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ABSTRACT

This journal is for those interested in modern language teacher training. Several aims are to provide a forum for ideas, information, and news, to put trainers in touch with each other, and to give those involved with teacher training a feeling of how trainers in other fields operate as well as building up a pool of experience within modern language teacher training. A variety of formats is used, including articles, letters, comment, quotation, cartoon, interview, spoof, and haiku ideas. Regular features include the following: "Course Report"; "Trainee Voices"; "Just for Interest"; "Conference Report"; "Publications Received"; "Training around the World"; "People Who Train People"; "Trainer Background"; "Q and A"; "Language Matters"; "Session Report"; and "Process Options." Topics covered in volume 14 focus on the following issues: an honest account of one trainer's change, regional teacher trainers debate, teachers discuss a visit by an outside trainer, moving from direct to indirect peer mentoring, getting the most out of pre-service courses, getting the most out of in-service workshops, teacher beliefs, comments on the regional teachers debate, training for the gifted, developing trainer observation and feedback skills, peer mediation and conflict resolution, peers help each other to write dissertations, the importance of trust in working with teachers, tempting the reluctant to professional workshops, the new British institute of English language training, and native and non-native teachers teaching side by side. (Some articles contain references.) (KFT)

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# The Teacher Trainer: A Practical Journal Mainly for Modern Language Teacher Trainers, 2000.

Volume 14, Numbers 1-3
Spring, Summer, and Autumn

Tessa Woodward, Editor

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# The Teacher Trainer

A PRACTICAL JOURNAL MAINLY FOR MODERN LANGUAGE TEACHER TRAINERS

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Vol. 14 No.1

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# The Teacher Trainer

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## ABOUT "THE TEACHER TRAINER"

"The Teacher Trainer" is a journal especially for those interested in modern language teacher training. Whether you are a teacher who tends to be asked questions by others in a staffroom, or a Director of Studies with a room of your own, whether you are a course tutor on an exam course, or an inspector going out to schools, this journal is for you. Our aims are to provide a forum for ideas, information and news, to put trainers in touch with each other and to give those involved in teacher training a feeling of how trainers in other fields operate as well as building up a pool of experience within modern language teacher training.

The journal comes out three times a year and makes use of a variety of formats e.g. article, letter, comment, quotation, cartoon, interview, spoof, haiku ideas. If the idea is good, we'll print it whatever voice you choose to express it in.

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# Editorial

Welcome to Volume Fourteen and our first issue in a new year, new century and new thousand years, if you count according to one particular type of calendar.

This journal started life in the Autumn of 1986. There was not much around in the way of support for modern language teacher trainers then. The journal itself was only twelve pages long and had just five articles in it. And I had to do some persuading to get those five articles. In the fourteen years since we started, a lot has changed. The journal itself is now well-designed, 32 pages long and contains an average of ten or so articles each time. These days any teacher trainer with a little time, energy and money can count on plenty of courses, conferences, books and ideas dedicated to making the job more interesting and professional. (See page 25 for samples of the sorts of books now available) I now have stacks of articles, queuing up to be published, from trainers everywhere who want to share what they are doing with others (See page 19 for an example) there is now a real feeling of an international professional community of teacher trainers. I feel this most keenly at the annual Edinburgh symposium (See page 23 for a conference report) where you have the chance to learn about scores of different projects from all over the world.

Apart from a growing feeling of professional community, there is growing respect for the "regional teacher trainer" too. The names, skills and energy of non-native speaking teacher trainers around the world are now recognised (see page 7 for this debate). And as we live in an era of deconstruction, this inevitably means that the native speaker teacher trainer, past icon, past guru, sometimes comes in for a bit of a drubbing (See page 8 for one).

Other themes which have emerged as important in our field are:

- listening to the voices and stories of our colleagues as they tell us about their work (See page 3 and 12)
- listening to the voices and stories of our clients the teachers we work with (See page 10 and 18)
- the explosion in demand for English teachers as millions of school learners around the world switch on to the language (See page 14)
- the exploration of different forms of training such as cascade training, apprenticeship and mentoring (See page 21)

The Teacher Trainer continues to be a full-time personal enthousiasm of mine as well as a part-time job. May you find it as thought provoking, iconoclastic, balanced and useful as I do!

Tessa Woodward

The Editor

## Would you like to send something in to "The Teacher Trainer"?

"The Teacher Trainer" is designed to be a forum for trainers, teachers and trainees all over the world. If you'd like to send in a letter, a comment, a cartoon, a taped conversation or an article sharing information, ideas or opinions we'll be very happy to receive it. If you would like to send us an article, please try to write it in an accessible non-academic style. Lengths should normally be 800 – 4,000 words. Send your first draft in on paper typed in double spacing with broad margins. Your article will be acknowledged by pro-forma letter. Once you have had comments back later and have finalised your draft in negotiation with the editor, we will ask you to send us three hard (paper) copies and if at all possible a floppy disk (micro 3½" or 9cm). **Your article needs to be saved on the disk as a Microsoft Word (98 or lower) or as an ASCII file**. Keep your headings and sub-headings in **upper and lower case throughout**. Finally, please give an accurate word count. We try to publish your article within about five issues, but if it is an awkward length it may be longer. It will be assumed that your article has not been published before nor is being considered by another publication.

We look forward to reading your article!

# A Trainer's Attempt at 'Change'

**SURABHI BHARATI, CIEFL, HYDERABAD, INDIA**

## Introduction

This is my story. It is about a training programme offered in India through the distance mode of training. I begin my story by giving a brief introduction to the way I used to teach, then explore the need for a change in the teacher education programme, and finally, suggest how training room practices can be changed with the help of trainees.

### The way I used to train

The overall aim of the Postgraduate Certificate in the Teaching of English (PGCTE) programme that we offer is the personal and professional empowerment of our trainees. This is achieved through courses like Methods of Teaching, Materials for Teaching, Practice Teaching, Phonetics and Spoken English, Introduction to Linguistics, and Teaching of Grammar.

Following is a brief description of the way I used to train. My job is to make the trainees aware of their pronunciation. I expose them to the basic tenets of Phonetics and suggest ways in which they can improve their own pronunciation and the pronunciation of their learners within the existing constraints of large classes, little time, no tasks/books related to the teaching of phonetics, heavy syllabus, etc. Until quite recently I did the following things in my class: (a) asked the trainees questions (as they had already read the materials and done the assignments before coming to us) on each unit of the self-instructional materials sent to them. If they could not answer/explain a particular concept in Phonetics I would give them a mini talk/lecture explaining the concepts, (b) give them practice in pronouncing and transcribing words and sentences with the correct stress, rhythm and intonation pattern of Received Pronunciation of English or RP, (c) point out the specific problematic areas to trainees coming from different language backgrounds, and (d) suggest that the best way to improve their learners' pronunciation was to improve their own pronunciation. Our present course primarily focuses on the Phonetics of English. We have little time to actually improve their pronunciation of English as they come to us for a very short (2 – 3 week) period of contact-cum-examination. At best, I can only make them aware of their own deficiencies. What I did could perhaps be best described as the craft model or the applied science model (Wallace 1991) of teaching/training.

Two things, I realised, were wrong in my practice: one, I was not practising what the trainees were taught in their Methods, Materials and Practice Teaching courses. Trainees were being exposed to a learner-centred approach to education through an autonomous, self-directed method of learning and teaching. My classes were more or less a teacher fronted, teacher led, knowledge based classes. Trainees were getting 'new' knowledge in every session but through the traditional way of training. The second problem was that whatever I was giving them was not relevant to their practice, experience and needs. Soon I realised, alone, I could do nothing about the second problem (I had to change the perspective of all the experts/colleagues) but surely there was something I could do for the first problem? I could definitely change my own training room practices. I also felt that if somehow I could make our trainees aware of their needs, then the trainees in turn would demand a change in the course content or style or question the need for the present course content or training methods. It was a long shot, but perhaps, I felt, it would make a dent in the perspective of my colleagues. How I did that is discussed below in section 5. What made me change is given below.

## Change in my practice

Through my association with the 'ELT' colleagues in my institute, I had realised that new trends were emerging in teacher education. Being a linguist, I had little exposure to these trends. My ELT colleagues also did not think it worthwhile to spend time in educating me (and I do not blame them. I would have probably done the same). Therefore, I did the next best thing. I did an M.Ed. at the risk of, (a) being ridiculed by fellow linguists, and (b), doing an M.Ed. after a Ph.D. (in Linguistics)! Why am I talking about this? I am sure there are many teachers like me, who teach/train not just English but other technical/content-based subjects. I want them to take courage and change their lives/perspectives/and classroom/training room practices. For it is only individuals, who can influence others- by changing their own classroom/training room practices- to bring a change in their classroom/training room practices, values, and beliefs.

Having realized what was wrong with my own training room practice, and the focus of our course in Phonetics and Spoken English, while training, my personal agenda was to (a) point out to the trainees that the course in Phonetics was a reflection and an illustration of what they were taught in their Methods, Materials and Practice teaching classes, (b) make the trainees aware of their needs (instead of accepting blindly what we give them), and (c) change the focus of the entire course (with the consent and help of the trainees) even at the risk of it affecting their performance at the examination. I also wanted them to realize that at this stage in their life and career (as they were in-service and adult trainees) grades were not important!

With this aim in mind, I tried to set the tasks (see appendices) within the framework of a learner-centred approach to teaching. Instead of imparting knowledge, I tried to involve the trainees in a dialogue. A dialogue through which we could collaborate in shaping the content, methodology, and the aims of the course hoping that it would result in their empowerment. I wanted the trainees to be in full control of their learning and development; and be fully aware of themselves, of their

*continued* →

context, of their culture, the demands of their profession, of their personal and professional **values** and **beliefs**. I also wanted them to realise **individual difference** and appreciate the fact that today, unlike in the past, we can come through different routes, different cultures, and different contexts and follow **our** way, develop ourselves and be responsible for our growth and understanding.

As teacher educators, we have to realise that any **change** in the attitude, values and beliefs of the trainees can be initiated only if we as teacher educators are aware of our responsibility to discover and work with the implicit theories, values and the subjective experience of the trainees. Any teacher education programme has to take cognizance of this aspect of our responsibility. The underlying principle therefore is to raise the awareness of the trainees—- awareness of the self and of one's relationship with the others within the total learning event. I feel this is best done following the reflective model of training, where reflection is used as a process that makes whatever is tacit explicit. This process leads to the formation of a theory from which new implications for action can be deduced. These in turn serve as guides in acting to create new experience. This definition of learning places emphasis on the **process** of learning rather than the outcome or content of learning.

Any teaching/training not only reflects the knowledge and the values of a teacher/ facilitator but also of the society where the act of teaching/training is embedded. It is therefore, necessary to examine the changes that are going on in teacher education around the world and its effect in India.

## Change in contemporary teacher education

Educated Indians are today acknowledging a shift in our value system. We have reached a stage where change occurs so swiftly that we have to learn to continuously reassess our values, beliefs, and patterns of behaviour. We are moving, as Pike and Selby (1988) state:

| | |
|---|---|
| * from the concept of freedom | * to the concept of interdependence (of nations, institutions, individuals) |
| * from competition | * to co-operation |
| * from considerations of quantity (more) | * to considerations of quality (better) |
| * from dictates of organisational convenience | * to aspirations of self development in an organization's members |
| * from authoritarianism | * to participation |
| * from uniformity | * to diversity and pluralism |
| * from the concept of work as hard, unavoidable and a duty | * to the concept of work as purpose and self-fulfillment |

Our society as a whole is becoming more questioning, more challenging, and participation is slowly becoming the norm of our culture.

Our teacher education system has yet to reflect this change. We need a model of teacher education where the trainees are encouraged to picture the **work place as a learning environment** with continual cooperation and collaboration of colleagues, a process that can enhance and supplement formal education (Kolb 1984).

## My new way of training

With a learner-centred approach to teacher education as my new background, I perceived my role as that of a facilitator who was also developing through the process of training. I was also involved, along with my trainees, in exploring and understanding the classroom. During the course of the activities, I realised I was ***listening*** to the trainees and surprisingly learning a lot about trainee needs. I had also moved away from the blackboard. I wanted to encourage the trainees to question and evaluate their assumptions, their awareness, and their knowledge and ultimately to modify them, for change is the only way to develop. I list below some of the activities I did in my class.

My aim in doing worksheet I (see end) was to provoke my trainees to explore and evaluate their needs (for both personal and professional development) and expectations from a course in Phonetics and Spoken English. Remember, I was hoping to change the focus of our course with the help of the trainees. I also wanted the trainees to reflect collectively on their own experience of learning. By making them critically examine their own experience of learning I was hoping to arrive at (in a plenary session) some strategies to teaching that we could adopt in our individual classrooms.

While doing worksheet II, I realized the trainees were acquiring the correct intonation pattern of English by *discovery* method. There are several reasons why I chose this topic for illustration. The biggest problem with intonation is that it is not very accessible to direct cognitive intervention. It involves making use of your

power of intuition, hunches and associations, etc. However, this very nature of intonation makes learning/teaching it a holistic experience rather than just a cognitive one. It is thus a good example to illustrate a *holistic* approach to teaching/learning. It helps in *enriching the classroom experience/language* by paying attention to interpersonal relationships. It also helped me to relate intonation to their *experience of using* a language. All languages have intonation patterns and for expressing some emotions all of us in the same language community use the same intonation pattern. Hence, intonation was not something *new*. Most of our trainees used to find intonation the most difficult part of our course. Once they realized that they not only knew how to produce the tones but were also using them in their mother tongue(s), they actually started enjoying the class. Now all they had to learn was the appropriate use of the tone (as it may vary from language to language). The learners had to use their *subjective* and *intuitive* impressions at their *own level of awareness* of using language in a *meaningful context*. I felt this was a nice way of introducing trainees to an experiential, holistic approach to learning/teaching.

I had still not illustrated how we could relate teaching of Phonetics to their classroom practice. I also wanted the trainees to start thinking about the ways in which their learners were disposed to learn. Activities III and IV were designed with this in mind. At the end of these activities, the trainees felt they could do something in their classrooms. Earlier their common refrain was *'...but Madam, we cannot do this in our classrooms'*. Now they were saying *'...yes madam, we think we can do this in our classrooms'*, *'...we'll have to work very hard!'* *'.... Madam our colleagues from other departments will laugh at us'*, *'.... even the students might complain...they want us to just prepare them for the exam'* , *'....Madam sometimes even the parents come and fight with us!'* . This outpour of reactions helped us in coming together in our fight for change in our classroom practices.

My aim in asking the trainees to do worksheet V was simply to make them realise the different roles both the teacher and the learners will have to play within an inductive, learner-centred approach to teaching/training. I also wanted the trainees to be aware of how a bridge could be built linking their Methods classes to their classes in Phonetics.

## Conclusion

At the end of our contact programme, I felt my trainees had acquired the 'knowledge' they needed but this time not in a vacuum. This time my class was an extension and perhaps even an illustration of what they were learning in their Methods, Materials, and Practice teaching sessions. The class had become more meaningful and purposeful. It had shown *it could be done*. It had bridged the gap between theory and practice.

Did it influence my colleagues? The answer is a big YES. Many of them in their private conversations started saying how teaching the **theory** of Phonetics was not as relevant for our trainees as the practice. In addition, I am happy to report that an effect of this change was also

*continued* ➔

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seen in our oral examination (although it was within closed doors) for Phonetics and Spoken English. Slowly I think we will change our practice publicly as well.

In this article, I have narrated an instance of personal change, which slowly resulted in a change in perspectives of the trainees as well as fellow trainers. What emerged as important learning points are: (a) content based subjects can be taught through a learner-centred approach to teaching/training, and (b) even trainees, at times, act as mediators in order to accelerate and direct the intended change.

## Appendix

**Worksheet I**

**Objectives:** This task encourages you to reflect on your own experience of learning Phonetics and Spoken English, and to explore and evaluate your needs for doing this course.

1. Discuss in small groups why there is a need to have a course in Phonetics and Spoken English in a PGCTE course? List 2-3 reasons.
2. Do you think the course (having read it and done the assignments) fulfills what you perceive as your needs/reasons in (1)?
3. The course aims to give you both 'knowledge' and 'practice'. Which aspect is, in your opinion, more useful for your classroom practices?
4. Did you come across any difficulties while studying for this course? If yes, what was the nature of these difficulties?
5. Did you find that the act of reading (about Phonetics) itself contributed to your learning of the pronunciation? In what ways?
6. How important is teacher- input in a content-based course given/taught through a learner/person centred approach to learning/training?

**Worksheet II**

**Objective:** This task helps you to increase your awareness of a range of factors involved in acquiring intonation and in turn, understand how learning can be made holistic and experiential even in a content based subject.

1. Work in small groups and think of different ways in which the following sentence could be said. You probably need to imagine a context. (Underhill, 1994)

*It is eight o'clock!*

2. In small groups, produce an equivalent of the following sentences in your mother tongue(s). When one of you is producing the sentences, the others should try to identify the tone used for each of these sentences.

*Please open the window.*
*Shut the door.*
*How beautiful!*
*Are you a vegetarian?*
*Let's go to the cinema.*

**Worksheet III**

**Objective:** This task encourages you to empathise with your learners and make teaching/learning a rewarding experience.

1. State the common problem(s) you may have noticed in the speech of your learners.
2. What measures would you take to fit into your timetable the extra time you need to correct the pronunciation of your learners?
3. Do you think it requires a lot more effort from you as a teacher? Is it worth taking the trouble to correct the pronunciation of your learners? Remember the constraints within which you work.
4. If you agree with (3) then state at least two steps you would take to ensure and enable you to put in the required extra time and effort?

**Worksheet IV**

**Objective:** This task encourages you to link 'knowledge' with 'practice' in your classroom.

Work in groups and state how would you make your class a communicative, inductive, and learner-centred one. Illustrate with the help of one activity for teaching Spoken English/correcting errors in their pronunciation.

**Worksheet V**

**Objective:** This task raises your awareness of the role of the teacher and the learners in a learner centred classroom.

Fill in the following grid individually, after completing worksheets I-IV.

**Worksheet V**
GRID

| |
|---|
| What was the purpose of this activity? |
| What was the learning outcome of this activity? |
| What was the role of the trainer/teacher? |
| What was the role of the trainee/learner? |
| Which approach to teaching did the activity reflect? |
| Which methodology was used? |

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# Eavesdropping on a debate about regional teacher trainers

**by the Editor**

Last June, I was sitting in an extremely uncomfortable chair in front of a computer scrolling through notices pasted on the British Council ELTECS board (<ELTECS-L@ LIST 1.BRITISH COUCIL.ORG>). I noticed a very interesting debate starting up on the use of regional teacher trainers rather than 'Fly in, fly out-ers' (FIFO's). Over the next few weeks contributions went up from Serena Yeo (Lithuania), Dr Radislav Millrood (Russia), Barrie Robinson (Slovakia), Terence Bradley (Hungary), Jane Nolan (Czech Republic), Margit Szestay (Hungary), Dr Irina Kolesnikova (Russia) and Phil Dexter (Slovakia). All these people had successfully used regional teacher trainers on local projects and so knew the issues involved. I read all the messages each day and then asked those in the debate if they minded my summarising them for the journal. They didn't. So here are the main points as I understand them.

## What do we mean by regional teacher trainers?

The contributors to the debate defined regional teacher trainers as being.... suitably experienced, British Council trainers from a particular region, such as Central or Eastern Europe, often non- native speakers of English, and trained in the UK or USA on study visits. These regional trainers, employed rather than or in addition to trainers flown in especially from the UK would, for example, write their own training materials, lead training sessions, courses or projects at pre- and in-service teacher training level and might well be involved in cross- border training exchanges to and from different projects running nearby.

## What are the advantages of using regional teacher trainers?

Apart from the fact that local teacher trainers are often highly trained they may have other advantages such as:

- being available at shorter notice than international trainers
- having taught in similar circumstances and systems to those the teachers to be trained are in and so able to be relevant and realistic
- having a level of English that is easy for local teachers to understand
- often being in full-time teaching and thus still in touch with classroom reality
- being very motivated to develop professionally
- being able to evaluate the success of the training 'from the inside'

## What are the disadvantages of using regional teacher trainers?

The contributors to the debate felt that there were some potential disadvantages to the use of regional teacher trainers. For example, the trainers may:

- have lower status than a UK/US trainer in the eyes of local teachers and the Ministry of Education
- be vulnerable to criticism as they may not be native speakers of English
- thus need support before during and after the project
- be tied to a full-time teaching post and have to fight to be set free to train
- be hard to find as they may not be very well- known.

## Does this mean that no UK/US FIFO's should be used?

Most of the contributors to the debate felt that FIFO's were good for international networking, for some highly specialised training projects and could also give a fresh outsider view when this was thought necessary. However, to be really useful, FIFO's need to have a good working knowledge of the region and institutions they are invited to and need an ability to work across languages and subjects.

## Problems to be resolved if regional teacher trainers are to be used more often

At the moment if regional trainers and FIFO's work together on a project, their rates of pay may well differ. This obviously causes feelings of unfairness. Also, at the moment, there is no register of regional trainers to help in the business of selecting and contacting them. This might be a useful thing to set up.

**The Editor's extra points**

Although I did not send in any messages to the debate, I have since thought of a couple of points to add. These are:

- Plenty of non-native speaking trainers who do not reside in the UK or the USA are now invited to train in countries other than their own. So the FIFO group now include trainers from France, Germany, Italy, Austria and elsewhere.
- Plenty of FIFO's have the same full- time job commitments as local teacher trainers and so are just as likely to find it difficult to commit large amounts of time to a training project.
- Some FIFO's choose to train on regional projects because they have some personal connection with the region such as having married someone from that region or having spent long periods of time there. They may thus have a good working knowledge of the region and/or its languages

If you have thoughts on issues raised either in this debate summary, in the Trainee Voices column or in Jean Rudiger's article in this issue please write in and tell us what you think.

# COURSE REPORT

## The Soap Bubble Fairies – a cautionary tale for visiting trainers abroad

**by Jean Rüdiger, Switzerland**

### Enter two fairies

Once upon a time, although not so long ago, there were two good fairies who came from the land of B-ELF. This was a kindly country inhabited by lots of other good fairies who flew around the world bringing their gifts of methodology and change to their godchildren who had made the wish to improve their Elfspeak and increase their teaching repertoire. We do not know why they were called good fairies but they knew they were so that must be enough for us. Possibly it had something to do with supply and demand, which although not very romantic, works a magic all of it own, and Elfspeak had become very very popular.

Unfortunately however, our two good fairies, although very well-meaning and convinced of the efficacy of their magic, lived and travelled in a soap bubble that had been blown in B-ELF. Whenever they touched down in another country their soap bubble just merged with the soap bubble of some more good fairies and together they made one big soap bubble, whose purpose it was to spread the good news of their sparkling, tinkling presence, throughout the forests, mountains, valleys and towns of wherever it was they were visiting. This meant that our fairies never got the chance to dabble their toes in any of the waters of the places they had landed in, breathe any of the air there, or feel the different soils under their feet. And after a while they forgot that such things existed. Even worse, they stopped looking beyond the walls of their bubble and contented themselves with regarding their own reflections in the sunlit motes which danced off the surface of their sphere.

### Time passed

So, time passed (it never fails) and they continued on their journeys. Everywhere people came to see them and paid them in gold for the spells they did and for their magic recipes. Elfspeak became so popular that it began to impinge on the cultures of other countries and in no time at all it seemed that unless even babies could use this language their chances of getting on in the world when they reached adulthood were slim indeed. Parents began to worry that their sons would never make the grade as dragon slayers unless they could deliver the death blow in two languages - L1 and Elfspeak. And it was obvious that in this day and age no self-respecting prince was going to marry a girl who couldn't bring up their children to be bilingual - mother tongue and Elfspeak, be she ne'er so kind charming, a good cook and the world's foremost authority on the lesser Russian poets.

Education departments all over the world listened to the rising clamour of worried parental voices, until, deafened by the cacophony, they decided that Elfspeak would have to become part of the national curriculum and be taught at infant school upwards. Not only be taught as a subject but become the medium for teaching other subjects in. As a result our good fairies were called to come to the aid of a small country not far from the borders of Ruritania.

### In a land not far from Ruritania

Now the reader might be forgiven for thinking that the native teachers of little people and halflings in such countries might feel resentful at having to put their mother tongue to one side and having to instruct their protéges in a foreign language. As far as I know no one in B-ELF has asked how the teachers there would feel if they were told that from this moment on they would be required to teach, say music, geography and sport, say in Finnish. Troubled, perhaps does not seem too strong a word. And yes a certain frisson de resentiment might be distinguishable. Not however, in our small country somewhere near the borders of Ruritania. Not at all. Quite the opposite in fact. These people came gladly, giving up a part of their summer vacation, putting the dog in kennels, returning the partner to his mother, and cajoling the bank manager into overlooking the already groaning overdraft. (Fittingly, Elfspeak methodology courses can only be had for gold dust) Not only did they come, but they also did their pre-course homework, for they are a conscientious and hard-working people.

Unfortunately the same cannot be said of our good fairies, who omitted, as a result of living in the soap bubble, to consider just what it might mean to give a course which had attracted people working in the state sector of a highly-developed country. It does not seem too far-fetched to suppose that potential fairy godchildren are going to have had some training. In fact their country might have given birth to a trailblazer in the subject of child development, and it is therefore not unforeseeable that such people may be well-versed in the theories of concept formation in the developing mind and the ages at which one can expect the ability to think in increasingly formal constructs.

### Things become complicated

This as it turned out was the case. The people who arrived for the course, native and non-native speakers were for the most part (although for the sake of fairness to the fairies we have to admit that this did not mean everyone on the course) highly-skilled, well-trained, very experienced teachers. To add to this there were a large number of participants who had extra skills and training, some were proficient musicians, every teacher of little people in this small country has to be able to play an instrument and be able to accompany the children on that instrument. Some people had a Masters Degree in education, others were taking a Masters Degree, and one person was three quarters of the way through a PhD in education, while another had just qualified as a counsellor. Nearly everyone spoke three languages, some even four or five.



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What all the participants had in common was a desire to know more, to fill in the gaps that their specialities had left them with, to get new ideas, and for some people there was the desire to improve their own knowledge of Elfspeak.

## The Giants' spell

Our good fairies never really appreciated these facts, for the Ogre, 'Ignorance of Student's Needs and Backgrounds' and the Giant, 'Cultural Blindness' had taken advantage of their preoccupation with their own reflections and cast a spell on the spell-casters while they weren't looking, so that they were unable to see or hear properly (or even remember all the names of the people in the group). The giants whispered into the ears of the good fairies, that they were to work within the parameters of the definitive methodological fairy tale, the Sleeping Beauty and that the poor benighted people before them would have to be woken up to the real world through their kiss.

## The spell works

And the skilled participants from the state sector di.' in fact believe themselves to be in Fairyland, because they found themselves transported back in time to when they were at teacher training college and having to learn about learning. Which, incidentally had taken three years and not five days. Instead of being presented with or encouraged to try out new language learning activities and then discussing the attendant (language learning) methodology, as well as how such activities could be exploited for further practice or adapted for older or younger children, the participants were forced to double back on the path of their development. Furthermore, unhappily, the good fairies were not aware of the political, social, and psychological requirements that the host political culture demanded that their pedagogues meet in the classroom. Thus, much of the information the good fairies imparted was inappropriate on a political-educational level.

## A result of the spell

For example, imagine the surprise of teachers who have been successfully teaching teenagers three or four different subjects at highly respected state schools for years, at being told that the magic key to teaching teenagers is to know what pop groups they listen to or where they buy their trainers. And here they all were erroneously thinking the keys to teaching teenagers were issues such as a liking for teenagers, a good sense of humour, a sound knowledge of one's subject and the ability to be strict but fair. Go out into the world and spread the word that the true information gap activity is one in which your teenagers inform you of the habits and habitat of Gerry Haliwell, Michael Jackson or Phil Collins. Ignore the fact that the French teacher is discussing the cultural differences between France and Morocco, or that the Latin teacher and his class are commenting on the strategic abilities of Hadrian, knowing where students hang out at weekends, say the fairies, is the way to get their respect. Forget the institutional expectations, parental and students expeccations, even your own expectations, do the things on this handout and success will be yours.

## An aside on some side effects of living in a soap bubble

The effects of living in a soap bubble again you see. If you teach in an ELF environment you don't really need to consider these things in quite the same way, because :
a) your methods are in tune with your institution,
b) your fellow teachers are all teaching the same subject in approximately the same way, and
c) parental expectations of private Elfspeak education are not the same as when Elf speak is part of the student's general education. In general educational terms Elfspeak is seen as part of a syllabus which is assumed to help form the student's consciousness of moral and ethical issues in the mainstream culture. It also plays a part in determining whether or not a young person can go on to higher education.

## We return to the story

Heads were sunk in hands, eyebrows raised despairingly, eyes and bodies averted from the younger of the good fairies, who with great good humour magically overlooked these signs of discontent. Luckily lunch and an extremely good practical session to follow won back the interest and respect of our valiant experienced participants.
Yes, this group of local teachers sat through it all, grateful for those moments when input began to approach their expectations of the course and- for the most part stoically, when it did not, always in the hope of better things to come.

## The spell continues

The spell the giants, 'Ignorance of Students' Needs and Backgrounds' and 'Cultural Blindness' had placed upon the fairies was a good one and lasted throughout the course.
They did not hear the cries of frustration as teachers were asked to brainstorm yet another topic 'I know what **I** know, I want to hear what **they** know..' 'Oh, I've been elicited to death', and 'I **give** all year in my classroom, surely if I come on a course I can expect to **get** something!' Nor did the good fairies seem to realise how quickly they could re-motivate people with hands-on activities, of which there were some and some exciting ones at that. No, the scene had been set and the fairies weren't budging. They had been sent to do good to the natives and they were doing it even if a lot of the people to whom it was being done to didn't like it.

## And the moral of the story

When one is in a guest culture one must be careful not to overstep the mark of hospitality. Each country has its own epistemological beliefs and does not necessarily want to take on the beliefs of other countries. While teachers are glad to receive new ideas and to discuss and exchange ideas, how these ideas are to be implemented must be left to the individual conscience of the indigenous educational culture. To expect anything else amounts almost a patronising affront to the culture one has been invited into.

*continued* ►

**So in the end**

So our story actually has two endings one unhappy one because all the willing people from the state sector went sadly home, shaking their heads in disappointment and not at all sure if they would risk their time and money again on the good fairies from B-Elf, and one happy one because the inexperienced, non-state sector teachers went home satisfied and joyful. For, as they had not had the previous training, or the politico-educational demands placed on them that their state sector colleagues had had, what had been so much repetition or irrelevancy for the experienced state-school teachers had been new and exciting for them. A pity the soap bubble could not have expanded to embrace these two small cultures within a culture.


## Journal Exchanges

"The Teacher Trainer" has arranged journal exchanges with

IATEFL Newsletter (UK)
English Language Teaching Journal (UK)
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Teacher Education Quarterly (USA)
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TESOL Matters (USA)
English Teaching Professional (UK)

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## Back Issues

If you'd like to know what articles you've missed in back issues of '*The Teacher Trainer*' send in £8 and a large self-addressed envelope and we will send you an index entitled '*The Story so Far*'.

If you would like a photocopy of any article in a past issue, please send in £10 and a large self-addressed envelope and we will send you a photocopy of the article you want.


# TRAINEE VOICES

## Outsiders inside: Trainers come into a host institution


**Bonnie Tsai, France and Maria Dessaux-Barberio, Switzerland.**


One complex situation in teacher training occurs when in-service training is done by a trainer who comes from outside the institution requiring the training. In our view there are three main reasons for the complexity.

### First reason

First there is the relationship between the host and the outside trainer. The outside trainer is usually invited by a person who has some sort of authority within the institution. Perhaps this person is the director of studies or even a school owner or supervisor. In any case there is immediately a relationship of employee-employer between the two parties.

Negotiations about fees, dates, and number of hours need to be made. In addition the host is often the one who communicates to the trainer the topics of the training sessions. In some cases these will be topics perceive as necessary or vital to the teachers' training but may be ones the host feels inexperienced about handling on their own. In other cases the call for an outside trainer may be simply to give people in the institution a change and some fresh ideas.

### Second reason

The outside trainer and the teachers in the institution need to form an immediate and often short-lived relationship in the few hours or days spent together. This is the second area of complexity. The attitude of the teachers to the training plays a major role here. Do they have a choice in whether to attend? Is the outside trainer known to them? Have the topics been chosen by them? If not, do they at least feel they are relevant All these questions will help determine the mood of the teachers when the sessions begin.

### Third reason

We also need to consider the relationship between the host and the teachers. Is it based on equality and trust or an inferior –superior dimension which is so often found in schools? The tenor of the relationship will often manifest itself in the willingness or unwillingness of the host to join in the activities proposed or the way in which they join in. Good hearted interaction between host, trainer and teachers, mixed with laughter, go a long way to building a strong team. This in turn leads to better co-operation long after the training sessions have ended.

The three elements above combine to make a challenging training situation for everyone involved.

## Voices

Here are some comments from an outside trainer.
"Over the past few years I've been involved as an outside trainer in a number fo in-service sessions What has always intrigued me is the feelings of the "top" person in these sessions. Did they feel threatened by someone stepping in or relieved that someone else was doing the raining for a change? Another intense area of interest for me is to discover the kind of relationship that exists between the folks who work together in than institution My most memorable experience was with two supervisors of a state-run institution who chose to sit one on either side of me and take notes on how "their " teachers were participating and more importantly on what they were saying! Needless to say, this did not create the warm and relaxed atmosphere wished for. Another dilemma for the top person is whether to participate or not. I personally think it's lovely and very worthwhile for them to get in there and do things with the teachers. This does not always happen and it goes a long way to telling the outside trainer how a group of teachers and their "superior" function together."

We asked a school supervisor and some teachers involved in in-service training done by an outside trainer to comment on their experiences. Here is what they said.

## Francoise, a supervisor.

"The teachers were really pleased with the sessions given by the outside trainer and most of them have tried out some of the activities with great success. The language students in turn appreciated the change form a more traditional approach.
As far as I'm concerned, I think it's interesting to have outsiders coming in to train the teachers because they bring new ideas. It's a good opportunity for the teachers to realise they have to put more creativity into their teaching in order to renew the language students motivation and to make them more active in their own learning process.
I didn't feel threatened or frustrated by the presence of the outside trainer but I did worry before the course began in case some teachers wouldn't join in. They sometimes expect a lecture or some instructions from me the supervisor. I was also worried they might just say, "This is great but we can't do it with our students". I think the teachers in my system
Need to be shown different methods and outsiders can help to keep both students and teachers motivated."

## Rosy, a teacher

"I've a tendency to imitate people and I tried to take a lot of the outside trainer's smile, pace and cheerfulness into my class. I felt more comfortable in my classroom as a result. I had the impression she understood us and had met similar problems to ours. At the same time, she taught us that there are no rigid solutions to problems but rather an attitude to adopt."

## Ann, a teacher.

"I think the first thing about the training was that we had fun! We enjoyed the activities and working with our colleagues. I found the outside trainer smooth. She gave out confidence straight away and I could trust her. I could just feel relaxed and do he activities she proposed. But at the same time my overall feeling was that although the activities were very nice, I would have difficulty doing them with the problem class I have. I did appreciate having the chance to express my reservations openly. The trainer dealt very well with the "problem child" in our group. She didn't put us under any stress either. She didn't put us in situations we couldn't deal with which sometime happens in seminars."

## Comments

The host we spoke to was truly concerned about keeping teachers interested and motivated. Bringing in an outside trainer is one way of doing this. The host wants the training to be successful because a lot of money, time and persuasion have gone into making it possible. It seems very important that the host and the outsider work together as a team. This can be done by the trainer giving the host a brief of the activities beforehand. This can bring insight and information to the outside trainer that can save the outside trainer from falling flat on her face! Time can be given too in the session for the host to put certain activities into a context and for discussion on how to help the teachers internalise what may be for them new approaches to teaching. This can also give the trainer time to sit back, observe and find the best lead-in to the next part o the session. It's very important that everyone leaves with friendly feelings towards each other. ...So that there will be a next time!

### WHO READS THE TEACHER TRAINER?

Here is a sample list of subscribers:

The Nagonga National Training Centre, Tororo, Uganda

British Council The Arabian Gulf, Argentina, The Ukraine, Turkey, Kazakhstan.

The Curriculum Resources Library, Sydney, Australia.

Language and Teachers' Centres in Eire, Italy, Namibia, Paraguay and Peru.

Universities in The Czech Republic, Egypt, Belgium, Canada, France.

Language Schools in Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain and the U.K.

Teacher Trainers in The USA, The UK, The UAE, Eritrea, Hong Kong and Laos.

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# The Indirect to Direct Peer Mentoring Continuum: Connecting with Teachers' ZPDs

by Tim Murphey, Nanzan University, Japan

## Introduction

Peer mentoring, as a form of professional development in which colleagues facilitate the development of each other, has gained popularity recently with presentations and articles appearing in many teacher education publications. This was probably initially stimulated by Julian Edge's 1992 publication of Cooperative Development (Longman). This article proposes that teachers have a certain degree of "readiness" for peer mentoring (PM) which might be conceptualized as a continuum between Indirect PM (what many teachers do when they read articles or informally share what they are doing in their classes with other teachers over lunch or in the staff room) to Direct PM (usually involving two or more people who agree consciously to help each other reflect upon their teaching).

At present, I fear few teachers actually do mentoring of any kind very often. Encouraging them to do it indirectly within a group in training (e.g. reading each other's classroom descriptions of successes and problems) may allow them to see they do indeed have things to learn from each other. Then they may advance along the continuum toward more directly solicited peer mentoring as they get intrigued by what others are doing in their classes and comfortable sharing their own experiences (Edge, 1992; Takaki, 1996). See figure 1 below.

Trying to start with Direct PM immediately may not work when teachers do not have the necessary supporting beliefs (e.g. I can learn from/help others) and capabilities (e.g. active listening skills) to sustain it. I am convinced, however, that all teachers are potentially mentors for each other and that they can develop more curiosity and collaborative skills through certain effective experiences.

## Sharing and Risk Logs

We might inspire Indirect PM through having participants in a workshop share experiences orally and/or in writing. For example, several groups of teachers I work with regularly are asked to keep a risk log and take one small risk each week in which they do something different. Each week when we meet they spend the first five or ten minutes in pairs and small groups sharing their risks. Sometimes they are so "into it" I let them go on longer and other times we start talking about one of their risks and never get to the planned class because of the excitement of dealing with their realities. I sometimes copy the risks (with the teachers' permission) into an informal newsletter to share with everyone. In fact, any "risk" writings could potentially lead to a group publication organized by the workshop leader or the group (see Access Publications below).

Figure 1

**Continuum of Mentoring**

| Indirect | | | Direct |
|---|---|---|---|
| "risk" readings in-group & exchanges | professional readings & conferences | distance mentoring through fax & e-mail small publications, presentations | face to face observation |

For some reason, groups of teachers coming from different schools usually seem more willing to talk and share experiences than do groups of teachers inside the same school. Perhaps opening up to a near stranger that you don't have to "live" with daily is easier. Structuring this peer learning is extremely gratifying for a trainer and in my experience it does seem to happen more easily with participants from different places of work.

This non-threatening, safe distance may be one of the important features causing the increase of collaboration seen on e-mail. Learning from lists, such as TESL-L (contact "TESL-L: Teachers of English as a Second Language List"<TESL-L@CUNYVM.CUNY.EDU>), are safer because people aren't face to face, they aren't observing your classes, and you have time to think about your responses, or you don't have to respond at all (see Cowie and Cornwall 1998).

## Reality Testing

Another way to elicit such teaching-texts from the group you are working with (as opposed to texts from the field at large) which are capable of serving as Indirect PM in in-service trainings, is to have participants write up short reports of the "reality testing" of new ideas in their classes. For example, I asked 43 teachers in a four-day summer workshop to write short reports after one week back at school about how they increased the amount of English they spoke in their classes (note: research shows Japanese junior high school teachers only speak about 30% of the time in English and high school teachers only about 20%). These short reports (a few lines to a few paragraphs each) were then printed up without their names and redistributed to the teachers so they could see what others were doing and possibly be inspired by them. Hopefully, such procedures will open up at least some teachers to more reflection, sharing, and eventual Direct PM.



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## Access Publications

Teachers can also be encouraged to write their risks up for short articles in what I call "access publications", i.e. small newsletter and magazines which solicit short pieces from practicing non-native teachers, which introduce them to contributing to the profession in a small way rather than thinking they have to have a big long academic statistically researched piece in order for their voice to be heard. I put together small newsletters each semester that teaching staff, graduate students, and even a few undergraduates write brief articles, reports, and book reviews for. We have also made a collection of short action research reports written by Japanese teachers of English about their attempts at increasing the amount of English they use in the classroom (Murphey & Sasaki, 1997, and below). I strongly feel that more of such access publications are needed to allow teachers a taste of being published since this is a way to validate and get excited about their own exploratory teaching (Allwright 1991). It's also a way to start developing their own voices in peer mentoring.

## Access Presentations

I also ask my graduate student-teachers to give presentations, at semesterly mini-conferences, on a risk that they took and researched (small scale action research) This brings many of their peers out of isolation to have a peek at what others are doing. In end of term feedback, many teachers say that they worked harder on the presentation than anything else that term and that it was the most gratifying. For most it is the first time they have presented in public in English and to a group that even contains native speakers. Several have gone on to present at national and international conventions and gotten hooked on mentoring in this way.

## Meeting learners in their ZPD's and expanding them

Teachers quickly understand Vygotsky's concept of the zone of proximal development (ZPD, Vygotsky, 1962) or Krashen's simpler version of the i+1 input hypothesis (Krashen, 1985) because they spend a great deal of their teacher thinking time devoted to adapting ideas to meet and stretch their students' abilities. However they may not be aware that they have their own ZPD related to their ability to teach and that they, like their students, can learn a lot when they interact with peers and are challenged by the ways that others do things differently.

Teacher trainers are hopefully more attuned to the development-potential of this kind of interaction and read publications like this one to be challenged and stretched so that they can in turn learn to meet their student/teachers within their zones and stretch them with the information and tasks that are appropriate for their levels of development.

One more concrete example, touched on above, will help clarify the ZPD and the use of near-peer-role-models (Murphey, 1996), i.e. practicing teachers being models for each other. As mentioned above, most high school and junior high school English teachers in Japan actually speak very little English in the classroom. For years foreign experts have been coming to Japan and telling teachers they should speak English in the classroom. Not much has changed. We did something with our graduate students, who are all high school teachers, that looks very promising. We asked the teachers to increase the amount of English they spoke in the classroom, only a few words a day for three or four classes in a row, and to get feedback from their students everyday, asking them whether they understood the English, liked it, and wanted more. The teachers then wrote short case histories of their action research. Many found that not only did their students want more and like it, but that they themselves felt better and were becoming more confident using their English. They found that actually doing it teaches you how to do it. You don't have to know how beforehand.

Then we took all the teachers' case histories and compiled them into a booklet which is now being distributed to other high school teachers (Murphey & Sasaki, 1997). These case histories, I predict, will accomplish much more change in Japanese education than previous efforts for two reasons, both relating to the ZPD. One is that what is being shown is that teachers can adjust incrementally, a little at a time, and gradually get used to, and get excited about, speaking more English. This incremental increase is within their capabilities, their ZPDs. Secondly, it is not foreigners telling them what they should do. These case histories are by other Japanese teachers who are teaching in school everyday just like the target readers are. They are near-peer-role-models who are within their ZPDs, presenting highly plausible potential identities as English teachers who use English. Notice that we are selecting proactive examples from the community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) and letting the rest of the community become more aware of them. This indirect peer mentoring, I feel, encourages more incremental change than setting up "perfect" native speakers as the models.

Notice that in this example we are really addressing the whole system through finding good examples of the proximal changes we deem enriching and then disseminating these examples. One could talk, a bit stereotypically, about what the socio-cultural ZPD is of a certain group of teachers in certain areas (see also Nyikos and Hashimoto, 1997, who talk of group ZPDs in training groups). In Japanese education, the exam system still has a very tight hold on the culture and related organizational and economic systems. The ZPD of the exam system administrators is just recently being stretched to include listening comprehension in their entrance exams. That seems to be within the group's ZPD at the moment, as does stimulating teachers to teach more communicatively. Changing the whole system to have reliable valid norm-referenced tests hopefully will happen some day. However, change agents, as we are, we need to adjust to the students and the systems we are working with. When we do this we will find that we can indeed move mountains, even if only a little at a time.

*continued* →

## Teacher Educators

One of the jobs of teacher educators, it seems to me, might be to create more such engendering structures (access publications, mini-conferences, risk logging, etc.) that allow the cross-fertilization that takes place more easily among near-peer-role-models rather than suggest they follow "idealized teacher models" that may not be appropriate or sensitive to their contextual constraints.

Needless to say, your feedback would be greatly appreciated concerning these ideas.

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N.B. : A version of this article was presented at the JALT 97 Convention in Hamamatsu, Japan.

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# Training for reflective practice: getting the most out of pre-service courses

**by John Gray, Spain**

## Introduction

The British Council's recent *English 2000* report (1996) reveals that approximately 90% of the English language teachers who leave Britain to work abroad have certificates or diplomas issued by the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate (UCLES), or Trinity College London.

The two tier system of teacher preparation offered by both these bodies (certificate followed by diploma) allows for the speedy incorporation of novice teachers into an expanding workforce and, in theory at least, provides them with the opportunity to refine and perfect the skills they have acquired before embarking on further study. Although certificate courses are predicated on the existence of professional support being available to newly qualified teachers in the early years of their careers, the rapid development of private sector language teaching means that this is not always the case.

The content of certificate courses is thus a matter of great importance, given the short amount of time available for initial training and the wide variety of contexts (both cultural and professional) in which newly certificated teachers may eventually find work. Scrivener (1994) has suggested a *toolkit* as a useful metaphor for such courses. His idea would suggest that, while a pre-service course cannot hope to teach trainees everything there is to know about teaching, a good course will provide them with the tools whereby they can access the information they need when the need arises.

Over the last decade the model of the teacher as a reflective practitioner has received considerable attention. I would argue that the tools we include in the pre-service kit should ideally facilitate the development of reflective practices. The question is *What tools should we include?* - given the variety of contexts in which we work, and the short period of time available for pre-service training.

## The contexts of ELT

It has been estimated that the breakup of the Communist bloc meant that 100,000 new teachers of English would be needed to cater for a potential 30 million learners of English in central and eastern Europe throughout the 1990s (see Phillipson 1992). This growth is merely the



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latest stage in an increasingly well-documented global process. By the early 1970s there was a global population of 115 million school learners of English around the world (ibid). The scale of this demand (not only for the language, but for teachers of the language) raises questions about how pre-service and in-service training courses are to prepare teachers for the variety of contexts in which they may do their jobs. Norrish (1996: 2) argues that 'rapid change has become a feature of many teachers' lives' and he suggests that both pre-service and in-service courses must enable teachers to cope with this reality. He continues:

> ESOL in particular demands an even greater degree of flexibility than other forms of language teaching; its practitioners move from country to country, from adult to child teaching and from general to Specific Purpose teaching (ibid: 2).

Kachru's (1985) representation of the English speaking world as consisting of three concentric circles - inner, outer and expanding - reveals something of the problematic implications for language teaching and provides a useful framework for highlighting the need for teacher flexibility. The native English speaking countries occupy the centre circle. The outer circle is made up of those countries which were linked to the USA or the UK during the colonial period, and where indiginised varieties of English may now exist. The expanding circle encompasses the rest of the world, where English is being learned and spoken for a variety of reasons. It immediately becomes obvious that the needs of learners will vary enormously across a wide range of educational cultures.

Teachers clearly need to be aware of the educational and cultural contexts in which they operate, if they are to do their jobs ethically and their teaching is to make a genuine contribution to their students' education and development. It is for this reason that Stern (1983) argues for an understanding of the broader social and educational contexts in which language teaching occurs, given that contextual factors are 'likely to exercise a powerful influence on language teaching' (ibid: 269). The problem is that the pre-service training courses mentioned above are, mainly for reasons of time, unable to provide this type of input. Hence, I would argue, the need to provide tools which will enable novice teachers to reflect and respond appropriately to the complexity of their teaching situations.

## The Reflective Practitioner

Since the publication of *The Reflective Practitioner* (Schon 1983) and the two subsequent volumes (Schon 1987, 1990), ideas about reflection have pervaded the literature on teacher development. Eraut (1995) suggests that the notion of 'reflection-in-action' has proved so popular with teachers because

> Schön found words to describe a phenomenon with which classroom teachers were thoroughly familiar but which had not previously been articulated (ibid: 19).

However, he argues that because Schön was not primarily concerned with the crowded setting of the classroom there is a need to reframe his original idea to make it more genuinely useful for teachers. This is a view supported by Bengtsson (1995) and Cole (1997). The former argues that

> the term 'reflection' hides a variety of different ideas on the nature of reflection and its implications for the teaching profession and teacher education (ibid: 24).

This situation is evidenced by the welter of expressions that circulate, and he goes on to list some of these, eg. 'reflective teaching', 'reflective practice', 'reflection-in-action', 'reflective thinking', 'the teacher as researcher' etc. (ibid: 25). What these terms have in common, he suggests, is a core meaning of a 'certain enlightenment function' (ibid), and he proceeds to argue that reflective practice for teachers needs to be understood as including thinking *before* and *after* action, and also at interrupted moments *during* action when problems occur. His view of reflection is broad, significantly incorporating elements other than the practice itself. This is a similar position to the one adopted by Cowen (1995) in *The Knowledge fit for Teachers*. Cowen makes it clear that he is not referring solely to classroom practice in his advocation of reflection, but also to the broader social context in which practice occurs. His argument, which is about mainstream teacher education, is one in favour of a solid grounding in the social sciences, which permits more informed reflection.

For the English language teacher this could mean access to a multiplicity of disciplines. Some suggestions which have been put forward are: the history of language teaching (Stern 1983), cognitive and educational psychology, and sociology (Phillipson 1992). What Stern and Phillipson have in common is that they see the classroom as a historically constructed site, open to change, and intimately connected with the world outside.

Clearly these are areas beyond the scope of a short certificate course. However, it is the centrality of the practicum which has made the above mentioned courses so popular with employers, and, as feedback from trainees consistently shows, it is the practicum which (initially) occasions most learning. It seems reasonable therefore to suggest the classroom - its members, its interactions, its location, its problems - as the subject for initial reflection. However, this is not as straightforward as it may seem at first.

## Impediments to reflective practice

Cole (1997) makes the important point that while educationalists have written considerably about the value of reflective practice, many teachers work in conditions which are not conducive to its development. She lists large classes, unreasonable curricular demands, lack of support for novice teachers, lack of resources, and 'norms of complicance and conformity' (ibid: 15) as

continued

factors which conspire to undermine reflective practice and stunt professional development.

She argues that the contexts within which many teachers have to work frequently engender feelings of 'anxiety, fear, helplessness, loneliness, meaninglessness, and hostility' (ibid: 14), and that it is not until the causes are addressed that teachers will

> be able freely and meaningfully to engage in the kind of reflective practice and professional development that brings meaning to their own lives and the lives of their students (ibid: 14).

Many of the causes, she suggests, are broadly political, and she argues that while teachers may have a voice in the classroom and in the corridor, they still 'do not have a major voice in the boardroom' (ibid: 16), where decisions affecting their work and professional development are taken.

In the commercial sector, where many certificated teachers may find work, there is also an increasingly technicist redefinition of the teacher currently in vogue. In much the same way that state school teachers in Britain have had their role as educators reduced to mere deliverers of the National Curriculum, so too are English Language teachers being narrowly defined as language technicians with no wider educational brief. In Bamforth's chilling analysis there is a danger that the theorising, reflecting or 'academically-minded teacher' will

> have the same effect on the running of the school as would drops of water in oil for the running of an engine (quoted in Pennycook 1994: 166).

Clearly reflective practice is inhibited by the conditions prevailing in many schools and even unwelcome in some, if the above quotation is anything to go by. Time spent out of the classroom to attend conferences, time spent on in-service training, or periods of study leave (all essential to meaningful reflection I would suggest) may be seen as financial liabilities at best and dangerous at worst.

But apart from these institutional constraints, I would also argue that a further impediment to reflective practice is that novice teachers are often unaware of some of the tools for reflection they may *already* have at their disposal. Elements of pre-service training, which are dispensed with as soon as professional life begins, could in fact be applied to the teaching situation and enable novice teachers to begin to take responsibility for their own professional development. This could be achieved with a modicum of goodwill on the part of those employers convinced of its value. The elements I am referring to are: interactive learner/teacher diaries, peer observation, and group lesson planning.

## Applying training to practice

### Interactive diaries

My own experiment with interactive diaries on a pre-service training course (Gray 1998) where learners and trainees entered into dialogue about classroom practice served to highlight what Bengtsson (1995: 25) has referred to as the 'distancing function' of reflection. Feedback from the learners allowed the trainees to see how their practice was perceived, and thus enabled them to initiate change. Norrish (1996: 8) too, in the context of a paper advocating the examination of practice through reflection, has referred to the benefit of 'standing aside from practice and attempting to see ourselves as others see us.'

The diaries also provided trainees with information about learning styles, individual likes and dislikes, learner beliefs, which classroom activities learners found enjoyable and which they did not. As such, the diaries became a useful 'knowledge instrument', in Bengtsson's (1995: 29) formulation, and, I would suggest, one which could easily be transferred by novice teachers to any teaching situation.

While it would be inappropriate in many educational cultures to solicit feedback on actual teaching, interactive classroom diaries could be used as a means of enabling teachers to gather information about learners, their interests, their free-time activities and their more general comments on which classroom activities they found particularly useful, including information about previous schooling. Teachers could read the diaries and respond to the content of the entries (*Yes Xavi, I saw that film too, and I also thought it was great*, or, *I'm glad you liked the dictation - we'll do some more next week*), give personalised advice (*Have you tried writing sentences to contextualise new vocabulary? That might help you to remember better. Try it and tell me what happens*), and also use the information to enable them to supplement coursebook material when it becomes clear that learners have particular interests.

### Peer observation

Peer observation is a feature of both the UCLES and the Trinity certificate courses. Although trainees on the UCLES certificate course teach a minimum of six hours and spend a minimum of eight hours observing experienced teachers teaching, in general they also spend a considerable amount of time observing their fellow trainee teachers. On a typical UCLES certificate course there are often two hours of teaching practice (TP) each day for the four week duration of the course. Of a total of forty hours TP, six are spent teaching and the remaining thirty-four in peer observation. UCLES does not insist on the thirty-four hours of peer observation, although most centres do insist on attendence, as it enables trainees to establish a sense of group responsibility for the lessons.

Feedback on teaching, which is led by the tutor, is a group activity in which all trainees participate. Trainees are thus inducted into the practice of teaching *in groups* and they become familiar with giving and receiving feedback on their own and each other's lessons. What Norrish (1996: 8) has referred to as the 'solitary quality of the classroom' does not become a reality until the course is over and the trainees begin work in schools.

As trainers we know that observation, because of its link with evaluation, is often associated with stress. Ironically though, by the end of certificate courses, precisely because trainees are not evaluating each other, peer observation is often approached in a spirit of solidarity. Non-judgemental comments from peers on lessons and the discussions which ensue can be, and often are, productive of insights and group solutions to problems. Tutor observation, on the other hand, because of its evaluative nature, is rarely viewed in the same spirit.

Peer observation is an activity which could easily be continued into professional life. Norrish (1996) makes the point that for such observation to be useful, it needs to be understood as research rather than evaluation. By encouraging and facilitating teachers to have freer access to each other's classrooms, schools could allow novice teachers to set their own observation agendas and engage in research and reflection which would enable them to do their jobs more effectively.

**Group lesson planning**

Another aspect of certificate courses is the way in which TP is divided up into slots with trainees teaching in succession. One trainee might introduce and practise vocabulary which would then occur in a listening exercise set by another. Trainees thus spend considerable time planning their lessons together, and they are encouraged to see the two hour period as something for which they are collectively responsible.

Group lesson planning involves a lot discussion, pooling of ideas, and sharing of experiences and insights. As with group feedback on lessons, trainees can develop a sense of solidarity and become adept at solving problems, which in isolation might have proved intractable. Both sets of activites are, I would suggest, forms of reflective practice.

But, as with peer observation, the skills which are developed in group lesson planning (and after only four weeks they are obviously capable of further development) are often abandonned with entry into the workforce. One solution would be to emphasise more these three aspects of pre-service training. Trainees could be encouraged to see them as tools which can usefully be applied to the world of professional teaching, and those of us involved in pre-service teacher training could make the case for fostering such practices to the ELT profession through journals and papers given at conferences.

While I do not wish to minimise the significance of the impediments to reflective practice listed by Cole, I do want to suggest that even in adverse conditions, teachers can begin to reflect meaningfully on practice and the context in which it occurs. Some of the tools they need may in fact be already at their fingertips.

## Conclusion

By advocating the use of interactive diaries, peer observation and group lesson planning, I am suggesting the importance of the classroom as the focus, or at least the initial focus, for the prospective reflective practitioner. Stern (1983) in fact argues that thinking about classroom practice is an essential part of learning to theorise. But theorising also implies access to theory. It will be clear therefore that I believe teachers need to reflect on more than just classroom practice. On-going teacher education and the opportunity to step outside the classroom periodically are also necessary elements in any robust definition of reflection.

However, the complex and changing contexts in which ELT is provided mean that teachers need to be equipped with the tools to conduct their own localised classroom based research. It is, I believe, by entering into dialogue with students, through discussion with peers, and non-judgemental observation, that teachers can begin to find solutions to the problems they encounter. In this way they can also begin to make their own contribution to the broader development of theory.

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# Gina, Sam and Hassan

**by Barbara Lasserre, Australia**

Haven't you been told at some time or other that if you want to understand a different culture you must learn the language first? I have been known to dish out this advice myself. Following it up is not so easy, because a whole lot of other things get in the way, but, in the end, the bits of language that stick in your memory can teach you a lot both about yourself and the culture you want to get to know.

I had been planning a trip to Italy, when I was told by some friends that Gagnano, a place on Lake Garda in the north of the country was a miniature version of paradise on earth. It turned out to be just that; a small village of white shuttered villas surrounded by terraced vines and orchards right on the lake's edge, outdoor cafés along the water front just meters from the lake, and high mountains all around. Although the summer school for foreigners there catered only for advanced students of Italian, they accepted me, a complete beginner. I was convinced that somehow my intense motivation and the dreamy mists of the summer air would transfer the language by osmosis to my receptive brain. The other students included four Japanese priests, a Swedish diplomat returning home from a Guatemala posting, a handful of Polish University students, a small clutch of very proper Brits one imagined dreaming of Lord Byron, as well as a selection of Austrian business people who owned houses in the area and wanted to establish closer relationships with their neighbours.

Our teacher, Gina, quickly awoke to the fact that in Italian I could only manage to stutter the suggestion that we go to eat a pizza at Bogliaco, while the main thrust of the course was a study of texts by literary authors of great renown. I did appreciate the help of the Japanese priests in putting down on paper, in Italian, a short piece about Australian-Italian relations, as requested, and was amazed that this very relationship was so solid Gina didn't throw me out of the class. Maybe it had something to do with my rendition of "A Pub With No Beer" early in the course, at a school concert. At the end of the course I had confirmed that Gagnano is indeed a sort of paradise, and today I can still suggest we go to Bogliaco for a pizza.

Later, living in Nigeria, I continued to be convinced that language was the key to inter-cultural success. However, all that remains today of my attempts to learn Igbo, the dialect of southern Nigeria, is an amazed respect for the tenacity of the students in this afflicted country, as well as a blue folder containing vocabulary relating to haggling over the prices of tomatoes and yams, dealing with over-eager policemen, and a long list of words relating to rain. A vivid memory is the car trip out to the University for the language class. My driver used to always lock the car doors and drive at high speed along the road which went from the town of Port Harcourt for about 15 kilometers through uninhabited tropical flat lands. When I finally asked him why he always drove so fast, he replied that it was so the armed robbers along the way couldn't catch up with us.

My teacher, Sam, was a student of linguistics. I assumed he was giving private lessons to support his studies. The lessons took place in his room on the campus in a building with no paint on the walls, no doors on the common bathrooms, very little glass in the windows. We would sit primly side by side on his bed, on a mattress about 2 centimeters thick, while three or four of Sam's fellow linguistics students came and went in the room, delightfully cheerful, and not at all "fazed" by this arrangement. The topic of our final lesson was to be social introductions and small talk, but when I arrived at room 3 on the day, there was no sign of any of the students I had come to recognise, and no-one I spoke to had heard of Sam. The room was empty, with just a small piece of torn cloth hanging over the window. It was assumed Sam had been squatting in the room, but nobody was able to tell me what had become of him, or whether he was still a student there. When I try to remember his lessons the image of this cloth comes to mind, but not a single word of Igbo could I muster now if I had to haggle over the price of a yam, extricate myself from a tough encounter with the police, or talk about rain.

But there is always hope for the inter-culturally eager. My most recent language foray was coloured by Hassan, my Arabic teacher who came once a week to my house in downtown Damascus, Syria. He was dazzling with good health, and arrived with a mission, which was to have me speaking Arabic within one year. He was a body-builder and weight-lifter. He demonstrated this by lifting 80 kilos from a bench between the grammar and the reading comprehension. His zeal even extended to his accompanying me to the place where my towed-away car had been impounded. He also helped me on a visit to an upholsterer by explaining to him that the foam mattress I needed a cover for was to be used as part of a golf practice net, an article totally unheard-of in that neck of the woods. Here indeed was an authentic, natural champion of the cross-cultural and a language teacher extraordinaire who was convinced that I would bring honour to his teaching.

How could I have done otherwise? I am tempted today to paper the walls with the multicoloured texts Hassan wrote for me. The whirling loops and curves of Arabic letters which had initially resembled so many haphazard scribblings strewn around the page, became, oh miracle, decipherable. They had meaning. The sounds - which I had thought I would never distinguish from the sounds of a railway announcement played backwards - came to be clear and separate and lovely. And now, whenever I hear Arabic spoken, I also hear the sound of my teacher cracking all ten knuckles with delight every time I got the answers right.

# Making the workshop work

**by Paul Knight, The Open University,UK.**

The purpose of this article is to consider the role of teacher-training workshops in the provision of INSET training in private EFL schools. In it the author draws on his own experience as a teacher/teacher-trainer in such institutions to identify some of the common problems encountered in running workshop programmes and attempts to offer some solutions.

## Introduction

The provision of teacher-training workshops is probably one of the most common forms of INSET provision in private EFL schools in the UK at the current time. Indeed, in many schools it might be the only input aimed at professional development that teachers receive.

Why is this? Well, firstly it is usually the easiest to staff all institutions will have some staff members who because of their greater experience are able to offer something to their colleagues. Secondly, it is easy to organise usually an empty classroom can be used outside of normal teaching hours. Thirdly, it is usually cheap for the institution involved as both the staff and the premises are already paid for and there is little or no teaching time lost, either on the part of the workshop presenter or the teachers attending it.

If this appears to suggest that workshops are often run by institutions because they are unwilling or unable to offer anything 'better', then we must concede that this is often the case. If, however, it also suggests that workshops need always be second best, then it seems important to disagree. By looking at the major problems faced when using workshops as the primary instrument of INSET provision and possible solutions to them, I will consider how they can better contribute to raising standards among the teaching profession.

## Common Problems

One of the most common things which baffles workshop coordinators is the widespread negative feeling towards attending workshops amongst teachers. Feelings of apathy, resentment and 'put-uponness' are all common. Why is this? Is it perhaps possible to identify certain situations which cause these feelings?

The holding of workshops outside of normal teaching hours when no remuneration is offered can alienate many teachers. This is particularly so for part-time teachers, who make up a significant minority in most U.K language schools and a majority in some. The situation is not helped if the institution itself appears to be uncommitted to workshops. If their provision is irregular and such sessions are the first thing to be cancelled because of time pressures, for example during the busy UK summer season, teachers will feel that such provision is not valued by the institution and will therefore be less likely to value it themselves.

Connected with this, insofar as it also involves the perceptions of teachers concerning how their time is regarded, and again of particular concern to part-time teachers, is the question of what is to be gained by attending workshops. In an ideal world, all teachers would have enough time to value any input which might help them become better teachers. However, this is not usually the case. Many teachers are quite rightly concerned with their career development, but, sadly, attending workshops might seem to have very little to do with this. If teachers know that the next step on the career ladder, or whether or not they get a fulltime contract, is dependent on specific qualifications, they are more likely to consider time spent studying for these as more important than attending 'valueless' INSET workshops.

Another unfortunate factor which certainly occurs with disturbing regularity is the resentment felt by more experienced teachers, who often already have extra responsibilities, at being required to attend workshops that appear to offer them no benefit the 'I already know how to use a magazine picture library' syndrome. At the other end of the spectrum, a recently qualified certificate teacher might feel that the content of a workshop is too theoretical and not of use to them in the classroom - the 'I'm not sure about the Present Perfect so why are we talking about placing sentences in a landscape' syndrome. These are both more likely to be a problem in smaller and medium-sized institutions where workshop provision is limited and each workshop is expected to 'include' everybody.

If these areas of teacher dissatisfaction can be seen as deriving from the way workshops are organised, this would suggest that they can be solved by better organisation. How then can we achieve this?

## Possible Solutions

Both institutions and teachers have to be committed if workshops are to be productive. They must be seen as integral to the running of the institution by everyone involved, both teachers and managers. The terms of their provision should therefore be written down in teachers' contracts and teachers paid for attending them. If the time teachers spend at them is paid, then much of the hostility teachers feel towards compulsory attendance evaporates. Workshop coordinators will not then be faced with a group which includes unwilling members, but with a group of individuals who know that what they are doing is part of their job.

Writing paid attendance at workshops into teachers' contracts should be accompanied by some guarantee on the part of the institution that workshops will be provided regularly and will be not subject to the organisational whims which beset many educational providers. These two steps provide a basis of commitment upon which other organisational changes can take place.

As for the common 'More experienced member of staff giving the workshop, less experienced attending' pattern, it is generally better if all members of staff are involved in their provision. This does not mean that all teachers have to give workshops individually, they can work together in pairs or groups encouraging the pairing of more with less

*continued* →

experienced teachers can often be very fruitful. Again this should be written into contracts and teachers given time to prepare workshops out of their teaching load. This not only involves everybody, but encourages flexibility in the provision. The varying nature of the workshops itself becomes part of the input, not just the content.

As often as possible, the teachers attending a workshop should contribute something to its content. This can take the form of an activity relating to a particular skill or structure, or simply be the recollection of their own experiences in a given teaching situation. For teachers to be able to do this the workshop needs to be publicised in advance, another reason for having a regular workshop programme.

Wider involvement of all the staff also goes some way towards addressing the problem of responding to the various needs of different members of staff. The balance of activities in the workshop, whether working in groups or using a lecture format, etc, and the balance of content, whether to focus on practical or theoretical questions, are also more likely to please more of the people more of the time if there is a wider range of people contributing.

Initially such a programme benefits from having an overall coordinator to help with both the organisation and content of the workshops. However, in my experience, the workshop programme usually takes off once a few teachers have shown that it is nothing to be afraid of. This shows that such a programme is really about the education of teachers rather than just about their training in that it encourages teachers to explore new ideas themselves rather than just apply them (Widdowson, 1990 Pg 62).

Another important factor when organising a successful workshop programme is to have a good system of feedback. This can take the form of questionnaires which workshop attendees are asked to fill in, or of oral feedback either in staff meetings or in private regular meeting with the ADOS/DOS. Written questionnaires should give teachers the opportunity to say what they would like to see in future workshops as well as asking them what they feel about the one they have just attended. Information gathered in this way can be used to suggest further topics for future workshops.

It is also necessary after a workshop to ensure that the material and/or ideas generated by it are not lost. For this reason workshops should be filed and teachers encouraged to refer back to them as a resource. One way that teachers can be encouraged to regard workshops as an active resource rather than as something isolated from day-to-day teaching is to encourage teachers to report back at staff meeting about how they have incorporated the material/ideas from a workshop in their teaching.

## Benefits

Obviously, teachers gain new ideas and insights from attending workshops, but are there any other benefits of organising workshops in the way described above?

For the institution where the teachers are employed, the idea of paying for the time needed to attend and prepare workshops might seem like an expense they can ill afford, especially in highly competitive markets like London. This is, however, a rather short-sighted viewpoint. Having better-informed staff will lead to better teaching and an enhanced reputation for the school, although this is hard to quantify. What isn't hard to quantify, though, is the ability to retain staff. Anecdotal evidence suggests that institutions with a good record of training and staff development have a lower turnover of staff. This means not only money saved on recruitment but greater efficiency as there is not a constant cycle of people 'settling in'.

Institutions also benefit from such provision as it encourages 'bottom-up' input into the organisation. Many important developments in the area of curriculum have come about through bottom-up input in state school language education (Clark, 1987) and there seems no reason why the same should not be true of EFL teaching in private institutions. Input into the organisation need not just be related to curriculum matters but might touch upon other matters such as timetabling or even marketing the institution, etc.

Teachers also benefit by giving workshops themselves. The opportunity to explore a particular area of interest and pass on what they learn to colleagues is a great chance. It can act as a springboard for their own classroom research and encourages them to be active and creative, rather than passive recipients of other people's ideas that is they become more self-directed (Nunnan, 1989). Also the cooperative element of working together with another teacher can form the basis of collaborative teaching, itself another 'catalyst for teacher development' (Edmunsdon & Fitzpatrick, 1997).

## Conclusion

Overall, it seems that INSET provision in private EFL schools could be easily improved if workshops, the current mainstay of such provision, were reorganised. Nothing radical has been proposed above, many institutions are already running similar programmes, therefore there seems to be no reason why this particular example of 'best' practice cannot be adopted much more widely. To do so would be a small step in the professionalisation of our field.

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# Creating Congruence in Mentoring Styles

**by Ingrid Wisniewska, The British Council, Prague, Czech Republic**

*Many of the problems faced by trainees on teaching practice are mirrored in the problems faced by new mentors in conducting feedback discussions. Recognising these similarities can help mentor trainers to design courses which will enable mentors to make more effective use of feedback discussion time.*

## Introduction

Mentoring trainee teachers during their school teaching practice involves being able to communicate the principles of good teaching in a way that is both comprehensible and relevant to the trainee. The feedback session itself provides valuable input on the desired qualities of teaching/learning interactions. These qualities can be conveyed verbally, in explicit comments and instructions, and non-verbally, through the use of intonation and body language. They can also be conveyed in the procedures used by the mentor in pre- or post- observation discussions.

## Background

On courses that I have been teaching for new mentors in the Czech Republic, I noticed that the procedures being used by mentors in their feedback sessions did not always reflect the principles of teaching which they were trying to convey to their trainees.

The mentor training courses had been organised as part of a new mentoring programme initiated by Radka Perclova, ELT methodologist at the English Department of the Faculty of Education of Charles University, Prague, Czech Republic. The aim of this programme was to train promising but less experienced teachers of English to become mentors, due to the shortage of more experienced teachers of English in Czech schools. In most cases, the teachers had not had much experience of mentoring and had chosen to participate in this programme in order to pursue their own professional development.

In this context, new mentors tended to use the more prescriptive styles of helping which they experienced when they first trained to be teachers, although the principles they put into practice in their own teaching are now very different. In other words, the principles which they are trying to put across to their trainees - and which they use in their own language teaching - are not reflected in the procedures which they use for the feedback session.

The necessity for 'congruence' or 'harmony' between content and process has been persuasively argued by Tessa Woodward in 'Models and Metaphors in Language Teacher Training.'(1991) She asserts that 'mirroring content in process .....causes learning to take place at a deeper level' (Woodward, 1988). Is this kind of congruence also possible within the context of the mentor/trainee pre- or post-observation discussion? And how can we pinpoint those features which would be of most help in the professional development not only of the trainee but also that of the mentor?

## Investigating the problem

I decided to investigate this issue by looking at the problems experienced by the mentors in their work with trainees and then comparing them to those experienced by the trainees in the classroom. The trainees' problems were described in their written self-evaluations at the end of their teaching practice. The mentors' problems were written down individually by mentors as part of a session on the mentor-training course (see author's article in The Teacher Trainer Vol. 13 No.1).

Here are some examples of trainees' and mentors' problems which I have paired up according to similar themes.(All problems were written anonymously):

**Planning/timing**

*trainee:* 'I am not very good at planning the time we spent on each activity - need better sense of timing the lesson.'

*mentor:* 'Sometimes I wasn't able or I forgot to give them all necessary advice, that's why I had to mention it after their lesson (it would be better to do it before)'

**Giving instructions**

*trainee:* 'I'm not good at giving clear instructions. It's difficult for me because I always try to give them in English and sometimes they didn't understand.'

*mentor:* 'Give clear instructions. sometimes my trainee understood my instructions in another way'

**Explaining why**

*trainee:* 'Shall I tell them why I want them to do certain things such as re-writing a letter in order to practise some structures?'

*mentor:* 'I sometimes find it difficult to make the student teacher think why she is doing the activity or exercise from the text book (the aim of it).'

**Flexibility**

*trainee:* 'When standing at the blackboard, as a teacher, I had a plan of the lesson written down on a paper and the lesson would always be somehow different to the one I had planned.'

*mentor:* 'I think that sometimes it was difficult for me to accept this way of teaching which at the beginning seems that it can't work but afterwards I found out that it works quite well. To let them teach and try their own ways of teaching.'

*continued* →

**Confidence/Authority**

*trainee:* 'Because I teach in a problematic class, I question my authority all the time.'

*mentor:* 'Some students aren't able to accept some advice or experience from teachers.'

It was interesting to note the number of similarities that emerge from these problems, despite the fact that mentors and trainees are each speaking from different contexts: mentors from the one-to-one context of the feedback session, and trainees from the group context of the classroom. Could these points of similarity - the intersection of mentors' and trainees' needs - be used to design input that would be useful in the professional development not only of the mentors but also of their trainees?

## Using the data

Starting from the mentors' own perceived problems can help to plan input that is practical and relevant. In addition, comparing the two sets of problems can help the trainer and course designer to set up resonances between mentor/trainee feedback sessions and the trainees' classroom experience. Course input can be designed to help mentors think more carefully about the choices of procedures available to them and the potential that feedback interviews have for conveying subtle yet powerful messages concerning principles of good teaching, which trainees experience on both conscious and subconscious levels.

Here are some ideas for designing course input for mentor training, based on the issues identified by our group of mentors and trainees:

**Planning/timing**

Planning the feedback session and setting realistic goals, especially when time is very limited, is essential to making effective use of the time available. Negotiating with the trainee on how the time should be spent and engaging their co-operation in evaluating the effectiveness of those choices are practical examples for the trainee of student-centred teaching and learning.

**Giving instructions**

If giving instructions is viewed by mentors as an important part of their role, then the language of those instructions ( whether phrased as orders or requests, for example), ways of checking on whether instructions were understood, ways of obtaining feedback from the trainee on the effectiveness and clarity of instructions, can all provide useful insights of practical relevance to the trainee in the classroom.

**Explaining why**

Learners often respond better if they know the reason for doing a certain activity, e.g. one reason for doing pairwork is to create more student speaking time. Trainees also respond well when the reason behind different phases of the feedback session or the reason for a certain choice of feedback style is made explicit and when the different phases are signalled metalinguistically e.g. 'First I'd like to ask you for your reactions to your lesson as this will develop your ability to analyse your own lessons.'

**Flexibility**

Post-lesson discussions, like language lessons, can often take an unexpected turn *(sometimes more productive* than the original plan!). Being able to take advantage of such learning opportunities and letting the learner or trainee take over control of the learning process is a skill needed by both mentors and teachers. Strategies for responding positively to trainee-initiated suggestions - as well as polite techniques for keeping a discussion on track - can help both mentor and trainee to be more flexible.

**Confidence/authority**

The feeling of not being listened to can create feelings of self-doubt in anyone - not only trainees! Listening is a two-way process and being able to listen attentively to one's trainee is an important factor in encouraging them to listen to their learners. Discussing the need for mutual respect between mentor and trainee, as well as between teacher and learner, is another step towards creating a positive learning experience.

**Conclusion**

Trainees take many messages away with them from post-lesson discussions. These range from personal affirmations of self-worth to professional insights into how to go about the process of helping people to learn. The help they receive from their mentor provides one of the models on which they will draw in their future careers. It makes sense, therefore, for mentors to exploit the potential of the feedback session to create opportunities for experiential learning.

Recognising the similarities between mentors' and trainees' problems can help trainers to identify key issues which will be of mutual benefit to both mentors and trainees. Trainers can then design courses which will help mentors to create congruence between their mentoring style and their principles of teaching. In this way, the procedures become consistent with the message and reinforce each other to create a powerful tool for mutual professional development.

## References

Woodward T. 1988 'Loop Input: A New Strategy for Trainers'. *System* Vol.16 No.1 pp.23-28

Woodward T. 1991 *Models and Metaphors in Language Teacher Training*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

With many thanks to Radka Perclova for collecting data from her student trainees and her comments on this article.



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## CONFERENCE REPORT

The Seventh Symposium for Language Teacher Educators was held at the Institute of Applied Language Studies, the University of Edinburgh, November 17-19, 1999. The annual symposia are special because only about 50 people attend and most give presentations. Presenters come from 15 or so different countries and, since presentations are often held two or three in parallel, the groups are wonderfully small enabling real question and answer sessions at the end of each one. Held in a beautifully renovated old building and organised with great care, the symposium is considered by some participants to be "The best kept secret of the teacher education circuit!" One participant has flown specially from the USA for the last three years to attend the symposium. Plenaries were given this year by Julian Edge, Donald Freeman and Tessa Woodward.

For me, personally, the symposium is a delight since I can meet many subscribers and contributors to The Teacher Trainer there as well as attending sessions that display a fabulous variety of contexts and concerns. This year, for instance, I learned about the use of professional reports on teacher training courses in France, exam backwash effects in Japan, NLP filters and feedback sessions in Ireland, ESP trainer training in the Czech Republic and questionnaires on culture in the USA.

I attended a session given by Heini-Marja Jarvinen of Finland on Content Integrated Learning (CLIL) also known as Teaching Content through English (TCE). Especially popular in Holland, Belgium, Finland, Sweden and Germany, there are over twenty models of CLIL world-wide. By the mid-nineties in Finland, teachers involved in CLIL were asking for some in-service training. Heini reported on the specific theories, problems, optimum models and resources that she had come across in her attempt to meet this need.

It is hoped that a collection of papers from the symposium will be published at some point. If no publisher is found, I'll try to make sure that at least some of them appear as articles in future issues of The Teacher Trainer.

The Editor.


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# PUBLICATIONS RECEIVED

**This column picks out publications which are relevant or interesting to modern language teacher trainers.**

**The Cambridge encyclopedia of the English language** by David Crystal (1995) CUP ISBN 0-521-59655-6. Positive adjectives abound for these nearly 500 A4 pages of information divided up into: the history of English, its vocabulary, grammar, spoken and written English, using English and learning about English. Clear, accessible, witty and answering all the questions any of us might expect to be asked about English. A security blanket.

**The Oxford guide to writing and speaking** by John Seely (1998) OUP ISBN 0-19-863144-8 (Hardback). This book is well laid-out and cross-referenced and will help you with tasks such as writing emails, CVs or press releases, preparing for job interviews, researching and writing a text. Written for the general public.

**Dictionary of computing** by S.M.H.Collin (1998) Peter Collin Pubs ISBN 1-901659-04-6. One of a range of paperback specialist English dictionaries on business, banking and finance, medicine and law accompanied by work books and designed for teachers and students in class and for self-study. Definitions are in simple English with short grammatical notes and quotes from current periodicals. Enables you to cut through jargon and get to work in specialist English.(See advert this issue P32).

**Directions in staff development** Ed Angela Brew (1995) Open University Press ISBN 0-335-19270-X. Fourteen contributors from British universities deal with reasons for the development of all university staff, individually and communally, current practice, and implications for change in the future. Based on a critical reflective practice model.

**Action research for language teachers** by Michael Wallace (1998) CUP ISBN 0-521-55535-3. A book about the systematic collection and analysis by experienced teachers of data relating to the improvement of some aspect of practice. Set within the context of professional development, the author shows how to select and develop a topic, collect data of different types and record it in different ways, evaluate and trial teach materials and share ideas. The text is interspersed with interesting exemplar articles and is very clear.

**Mentor courses** by Angi Malderez & Caroline Bodoczky (1999) CUP ISBN 0-521-56690-8. The fruits of a mentor training and development course run in Hungary by the authors for the Ministry of Education, this book contains a selection of activities under three headings: principles and practice, in-session activities and projects and assignments. Activity recipes include participant reactions written in italics. There are useful photocopiable pages and an interesting section on challenging appropriately.

**Ways of doing** by Davis et al (1998) CUP ISBN 00-521-58559-7. A collection of 100+ activities written up in recipe format and designed to encourage students to find out about themselves as people, learners and group members. Flagged a s based on humanistic principles, the areas explored are: everyday life processes and patterns, mother tongue and foreign language, group dynamics, the coursebook, ways of learning and correction and feedback. An interesting re-grouping of both known and new ideas.

**102 very teachable films** by E. Mejia et al (1994) Prentice Hall Regents ISBN 0-13-106824-5.A reference guide to full length general release films that teachers could use in secondary and tertiary EFL/ESL classes of very strong intermediate students up. Indexed by title and subject each entry has a plot summary, short commentary and lists of pre-in-post viewing ideas and other considerations and ancillary materials.

**The resourceful English teacher** by J. Chandler and M. Stone (1999) DELTA ISBN 0-953-30981-9. Designed to address the needs of the individual teacher looking for ideas when planning lessons, this book helps you to exploit readily available materials such as newspapers, songs, readers and dictionaries. 200 classroom activities written up economically so you can read them on the bus.

**Beyond training** by Jack Richards (1998) CUP ISBN 0-521-62680. A collection of ten papers and talks given by the author over the past few years all arguing that second language teacher education needs to engage teachers not only in skill-gaining but also in exploration of the knowledge, beliefs and attitudes that underlie their teaching.

**Motivating language learners** by Gary Chambers (1999) Multilingual Matters ISBN 1-85359-448-2. Informed by research on motivational and attitudinal perspectives of pupils aged 11-18 learning foreign languages in the UK and Germany the author gives thorough grounding in the terminology, research, data and reports before outlining a few practical activities involving personal identification, role play and project work.

**Marching to a different tune** by Jacky Fletcher (19999) Jessica Kingsley ISBN 1-85302-810-X This little book contains extracts of a diary written by the mother of a boy with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). It doesn't take long to read and gives a picture of patient loving parents trying to cope with a sleepless, energetic child requiring constant attention and impervious to discipline. Exhausting!

*continued* ——►

**The theory and practice of learning** by Peter Jarvis et al (1998) Kogan Page ISBN 0-7494-2497-4. From the lifelong learning research group, this book discusses why "learning" has replaced the term "education", some basic theories of learning and some contemporary practices. A useful, non-technical summary of much that experienced educators will have absorbed over the last decades but will not necessarily have found crystallised all in one place.

**Teaching in action** Ed Jack Richards (1998) TESOL ISBN 0-939-79173-0. A collection of 76 short case studies form second language classes by teachers responding to problems they encounter in their teaching. Each case study describes a context, a problem and the teacher's response and is followed by comment by a teacher educator. The collection is grouped by theme e.g. teaching writing, affective factors, teacher development. A way of getting more teacher and trainer voices into your courses?

**Young learners of English: Some research perspectives** Ed Shelagh Rixon (1999) Longman ISBN 0-582-42082-2. Seven contributions present findings and discussions to illustrate research procedures that can be replicated by readers in their own environments. Topics include the value of story telling, the role of authentic children's picture and story books, strategy use, assessment and material's design.

**Business English: Research into practice** Eds M.Hewings & C.Nickerson (1999) Longman ISBN 0-582-42081-4. The expansion of business English in both academic and workplace settings has outpaced all other developments in ESP over recent years. There have been new fora, newsletters and conferences and a call for more research and sharing of good practice. This volume, designed to answer this call, is divided into two sections: learner needs and course design and analysing business communication.

**Classroom-based evaluation in second language education** by F. Genesee & J. Upshur (1996) CUP ISBN 0-521-56681-9. Written to help foreign and second language teachers in planning and carrying out effective and comprehensive evaluations in their classrooms as a tool for improving both teaching and learning. Non-technical and useful for different levels, teaching situations and instructional approaches. Smallish print with many exhaustive preview questions for the reader, the advice rests on an objectives model. Includes a good section on evaluation without tests.

**Implementing a lexical approach** by Michael Lewis (1997) LTP ISBN 1-899396-60-8. The implementation of the lexical approach (the view that language consists not of traditional grammar and vocabulary but, often, of multi-word prefabricated chunks) involves a slight change of mindset, classroom procedures and methodology but not a radical upheaval. This book explains the approach and changes necessary and includes reports from teachers who have already made the change as well as ideas for training teachers to use the approach.

**Don't put socks on the hippopotamus** by Terry Kelley (1998) Gower ISBN 0-566-07989-5. A hardback book of 75 rules of business life that illustrate principles of management. leadership, change, risk, communication etc in a lively anecdotal way. Examples of rules explained are, "Even blind squirrels find some nuts " and "No situation is so bad that a manager can't make it worse!".

**Flip chart games for trainers** by G. Roberts-Phelps (1998) ISBN 0-566-08025-7. From Gower, a publisher of business and management books, this A4 sized hardback gives sound, practical advice on using the simple, flexible visual aid, the flip chart. Contains 50 short exercises useful for icebreaking, energising, discussion, problem-solving and summarising. You will need to adapt the content to MLTT.

**Safety and challenge for Japanese learners of English** by Peta Gray and Sue Leather (1999) ISBN 0-953-30982-7. First Person/DELTA pubs. Written for non-Japanese teachers of English working with Japanese students in mono and multi-lingual classes, the book provides classroom activities in recipe format under headings: building on existing strengths and previous experience, developing new models of learning, discussion skills, counter-cultural surfing, tension release, focus off language. Useful.

**Teaching and training in post-compulsory education** by A. Armitage et al (1999) ISBN 0-335-20067-2. Open University Press. This textbook, initially written for use on UK certificate of education for post-compulsory (adult and further education) courses, assumes readers are engaged in staff development and are teaching or in teaching practice. Each section on e.g. student learning, group management, resources, assessment, curriculum, course design, contains practical tasks complemented by theory, analysis, information or examples of student work. It's a "dip-in- and- out" book with useful introductions, sub-headings and summaries throughout. Interesting examples are drawn from subjects including languages, catering, art, transport.

**Conditions for second language learning** by Bernard Spolsky (1989) ISBN 0-19-437063-1. OUP. The book sets out a theory of second language learning in the form of a series of typical and categorical rules and conditions accounting for differences between individual learners and between different kinds of learning. Interesting discussions of what it means to know a language, to measure knowledge, the relevance of age, ability, personality social context etc. Scholarly.

**How to study linguistics** by G. Finch.(1998) ISBN 0-333-66802-2. Macmillan. Assuming no prior knowledge, this study companion for British sixth formers and undergraduates has chapters on all the core topics e.g. phonology, syntax, semantics, a glossary and guide to writing linguistics essays. It tries to give the kind of overall perspective on the field and its components that linguistics teachers could give but rarely do.

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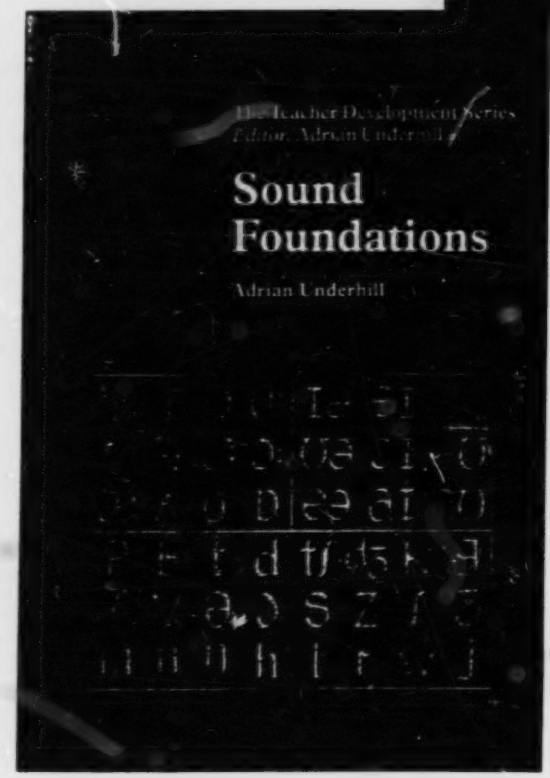


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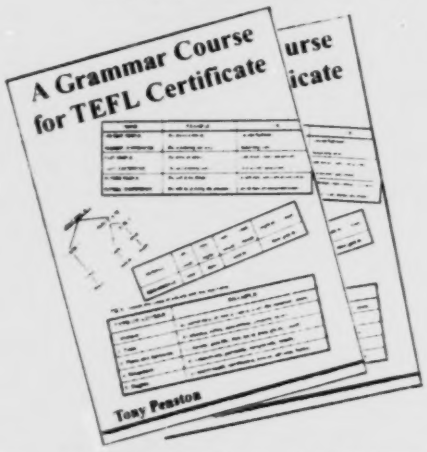


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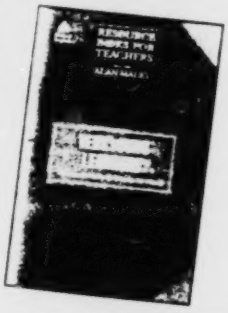

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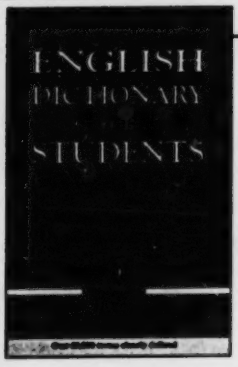


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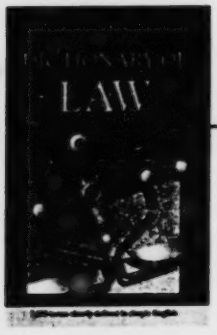


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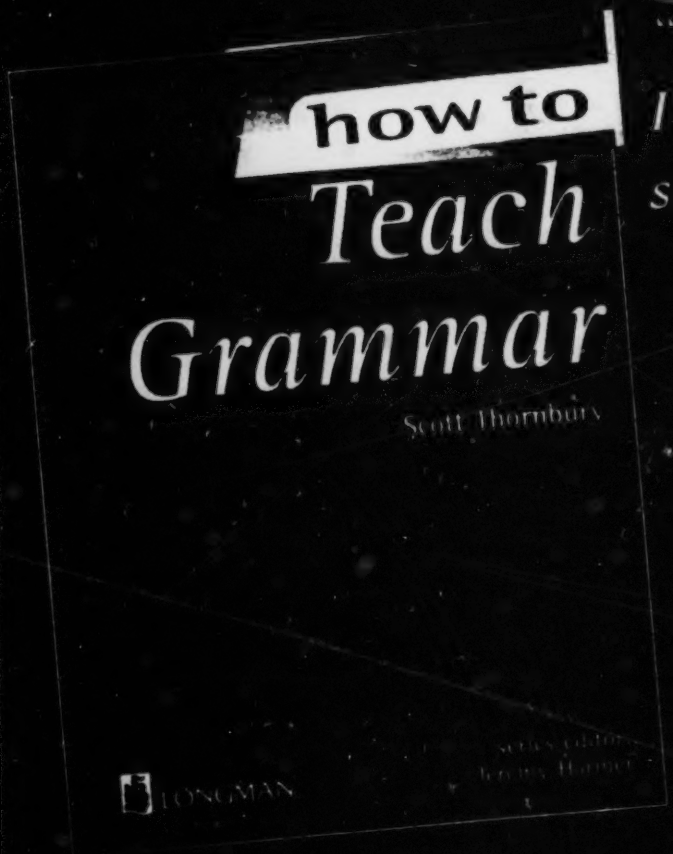


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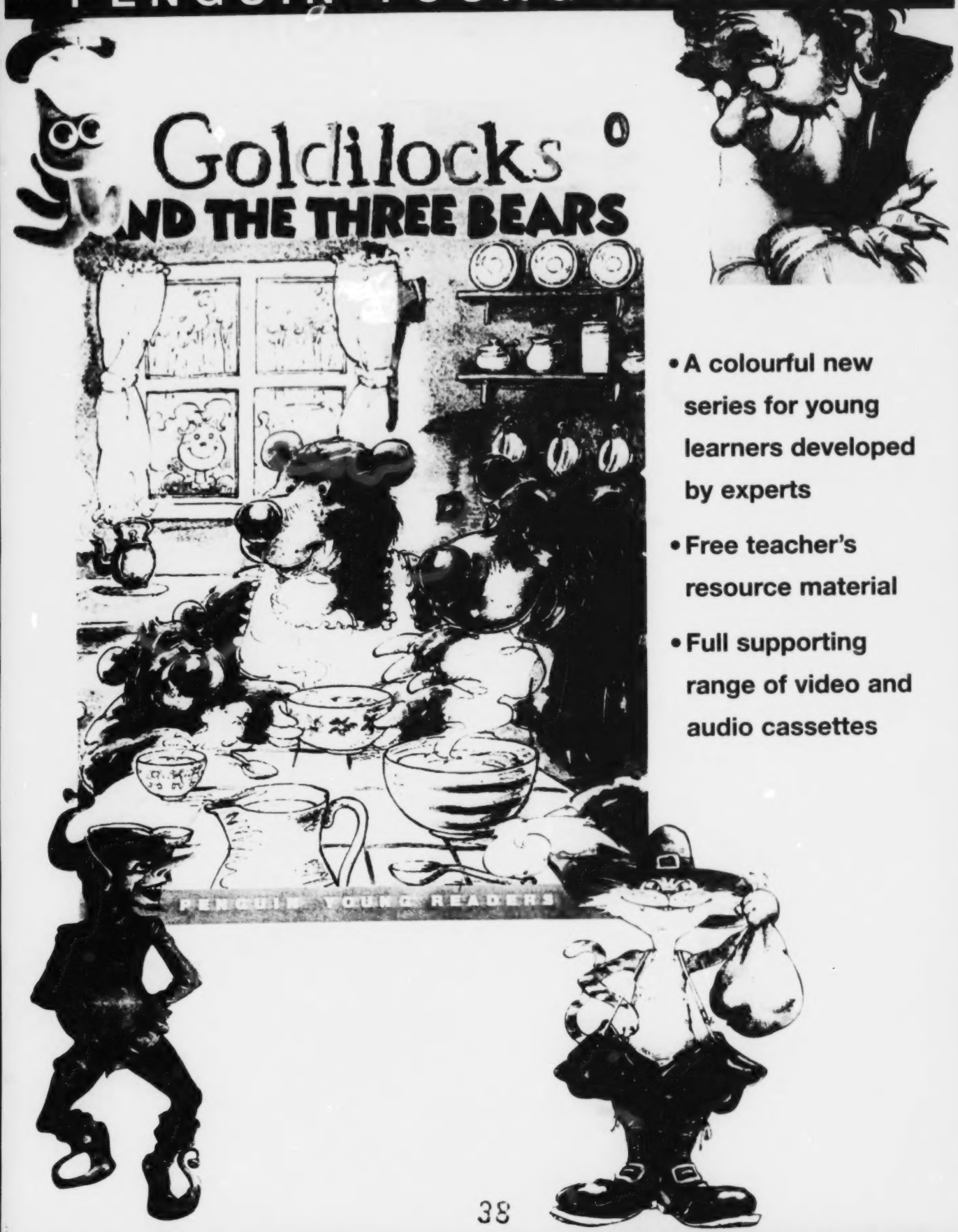


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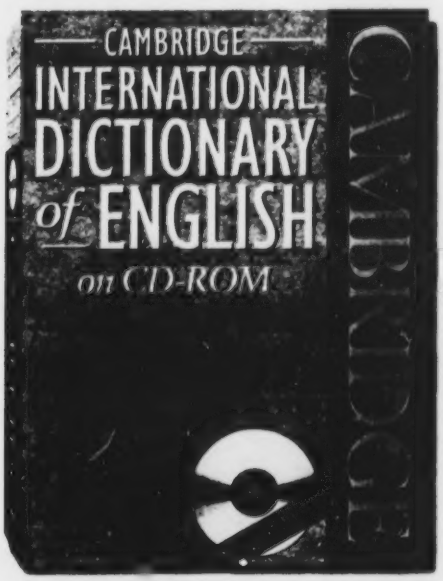


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## ABOUT "THE TEACHER TRAINER"

"The Teacher Trainer" is a journal especially for those interested in modern language teacher training. Whether you are a teacher who tends to be asked questions by others in a staffroom, or a Director of Studies with a room of your own, whether you are a course tutor on an exam course, or an inspector going out to schools, this journal is for you. Our aims are to provide a forum for ideas, information and news, to put trainers in touch with each other and to give those involved in teacher training a feeling of how trainers in other fields operate as well as building up a pool of experience within modern language teacher training.

The journal comes out three times a year and makes use of a variety of formats e.g. article, letter, comment, quotation, cartoon, interview, spoof, haiku ideas. If the idea is good, we'll print it whatever voice you choose to express it in.

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# Editorial

Welcome to the second, hot- pink issue of Volume Fourteen!

Our lead article (P2) this time comes from China. As in the last issue, (Vol.14 No.1) it is an account of how, after attending a course, a trainer has implemented change in the courses they run.

The debate on regional teacher trainers versus FIFO's ( Fly In Fly Outers), in the last issue, attracted comment. An interesting letter received on the topic is printed on P6.

Experienced teachers know so much. Inexperienced teachers need to know so much. One way of helping the latter to learn from the former is given on P7. Experienced teachers are helped to focus on and externalise their expertise on a particular topic, write up accounts, analyse them and then to make these accounts available to less experienced teachers who have asked for help on the topic. The particular topic evidenced in this issue is 'Developing good working relationships with students' but the same approach could be used with many other topics.

In our continuing and very popular series of interviews with trainers in fields other than our own, we have an interview with a specialist in teaching gifted children. (P13).

Many trainers still work within a judgmental frame when observing and giving feedback on teachers' work. Sometimes this is necessary. For the times when this frame needs to be supplemented or replaced by a more developmental approach, the article on P15 describes a way of giving trainers 'hands-on', live experience of supporting teachers rather than judging them.

The recent level of student violence in American schools has led to the introduction of classroom conflict resolution programmes which teach students how to resolve disputes through mediation. If you'd like to know how to use mediation in EFL classes, see P20.

We finish as usual with a thumb nail sketch of the latest books of interest to trainers. Browse P24 to see if you think they are worth reading or buying.

I'd like to finish off this time with heartfelt thanks to all the institutions that advertise in our pages. Some have been with us from the very beginning. That's fourteen years of support! Without them this journal simply could not exist.

Thank you all!

Tessa Woodward

Tessa Woodward
The Editor

## Would you like to send something in to "The Teacher Trainer"?

"The Teacher Trainer" is designed to be a forum for trainers, teachers and trainees all over the world. If you'd like to send in a letter, a comment, a cartoon, a taped conversation or an article sharing information, ideas or opinions we'll be very happy to receive it. If you would like to send us an article, please try to write it in an accessible non-academic style. Lengths should normally be 800 – 4,000 words. Send your first draft in on paper typed in double spacing with broad margins. Your article will be acknowledged by pro-forma letter. Once you have had comments back later and have finalised your draft in negotiation with the editor, we will ask you to send us three hard (paper) copies and if at all possible a floppy disk (micro 3½" or 9cm). **Your article needs to be saved on the disk as a Microsoft Word (98 or lower) or as an ASCII file**. Keep your headings and sub-headings in **upper and lower case throughout**. Finally, please give an accurate word count. We try to publish your article within about five issues, but if it is an awkward length it may be longer. It will be assumed that your article has not been published before nor is being considered by another publication. We look forward to reading your article!

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# Start with the Strong

**ZHU Xiaomei, Anhui University, P. R. China**

## Introduction

The whole idea behind this article originated from a controversial presentation on teacher beliefs and their role in teacher education at the 31st IATEFL Conference in Brighton, UK. The heart of the presentation was the argument that teacher development programmes should start with the strong, that is, teacher beliefs, rather than with the weak, that is, practical problems. The present article will attempt to specify a teacher training situation where such argument is applicable and propose a teacher training course that starts with the strong.

## Start with the Strong: A Controversial Presentation

> Teacher beliefs play a major role in the way a teacher behaves in the classroom. How can a deeper understanding of the characteristics and beliefs and how they come into being help in teacher development programmes?
>
> (IATEFL Conference Programme 1997: 55)
> (Special Interest Group)

This brief description attracted a large group of the Teacher Development Special Interest Group (SIG) members to Jan Aram's talk on teacher beliefs and their role in teacher education. The talk turned out to be the most controversial presentation I attended at the Conference. Controversial because by suggesting that teacher development programmes should start with the strong, i.e., teacher beliefs, rather than with the weak, i.e., practical problems as advocated by action research, Aram challenged action research. By arguing for "teacher as person vs teacher as practice, listening to teacher voice vs observation", she also challenged observation. Although Jan Aram enjoyed the participants' unanimous support for the importance of teacher beliefs in teacher education, the ten-minute discussion time following the talk witnessed a bombardment of questions, if not criticisms, concerning her challenges. Had it not been for the time limit, the fire could have become a real blaze.

I remained 'cool' throughout the heated discussion, for the simple reason that I was not ready to join in at the moment. Yet I have been feeling the smouldering embers of the fire ever since and building up a strong admiration for the ignitor. A browse among recent literature on teacher education ( e.g. Richards & Nunan, 1990; Wallace, 1991; Woodward, 1992; Thornbury, 1996; Thorne & Wang, 1996; Altan, 1997 ) shows that under the rubric of the reflective approach, action research and observation are two key concepts and essential elements in teacher education. A mere thought of challenging those concepts and the daunting authorities behind them in any way entails courage. The bombardment Jan Aram evoked by her talk seems to justify the need for such courage. However, to me, her talk still mostly conforms to the mainstream reflective approach. Consider Maingay's ( Duff ed. 1988: 118-119 ) definition of "ritual teaching behaviour" as teaching that is unthinking; that is, or has become, divorced from the principles that lie behind it and "principled teaching behaviour" as teaching that is informed by principles that the teacher is aware of. Consider also his belief that the most important role of an observer in most, if not all, observations is that of helping teachers think about what they do, of drawing their attention to the principles behind their own rituals, of leading them away from ritual behaviour towards principled behaviour. Jan Aram's argument for starting with teacher beliefs and listening to teacher voice places a clear emphasis on teachers themselves playing the role of an observer, i.e., exploring the underlying principles and working towards principled teaching behaviour. Rather than abandoning action research and observation, Jan Aram offers alternative ways of achieving the same purpose. Starting with teacher beliefs and listening to teacher voice can be an active substitute for observation by outsiders in particular and brings an initiative to teacher education in general. And more than anything else, starting with the strong is highly motivating. This is especially valid for the following teacher training situation.

## Start with the Strong: A Relevant Situation

In the midst of my studies in Britain, I received a very warm email-message from the Dean of my home department in China. He mentioned the extreme short-handedness in the department at the present time and offered me bright prospects for my contribution to the department in the near future upon completion of my studies in Britain. Well, I did sympathise with him in his short-handedness. Each and every dean of English departments in China suffers the same headache. Despite the long-standing Chinese tradition of respecting and honouring teachers, in recent China, there have been serious shortages of qualified teachers in all subjects, especially English ( see Cortazzi & Jin 1996: 70-71 ). Many English teachers are tempted away from classrooms by much more lucrative employment in foreign companies, joint ventures, big banks, and important administrative organs. New university English major graduates have the same hierarchy in mind when choosing future jobs. Some academic graduates do become teachers on their own, but they seldom regard teaching as their permanent profession. A large number of them just need an academic environment to prepare themselves for further studies either in China or abroad. "Morale in the profession is generally low" (Thorne & Wang 1996: 255 ).

Due to the shortages caused both by a brain-drain of experienced teachers and a severe short-supply of qualified new-hands, our department has been recruiting, as teachers, our own English major graduates and also some from other universities in recent years. Such practice is not only true of our department. As Thorne & Wang point out (1996: 254 ):

continued





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> Until recently, English-language teacher education in China was a neglected area. Even now, English major graduates from tertiary institutions, who have little or no specific training in language teaching methodology or educational theory, are often recruited as English teachers. The underlying assumption remains that anybody who learns some English can teach the language, regardless of whether or not they know anything about teaching and learning.
>
> (Thorne & Wang 1996: 254)

It is true that the young graduates we have been recruiting have little or no specific training in language teaching methodology or educational theory; but the reality is that we have no choice. We need teachers. Recruitment of young graduates is one feasible way to supply that need. It is obviously the department's responsibility to fill the gap in training.

However, as young graduates are recruited because of an urgent need for teachers, they shoulder heavy teaching loads from the very beginning. They can hardly afford time to attend any formal and regular in-service training. If heavy teaching load and low professional morale are two negative factors for consideration here, there are two compensating positive elements to be taken into account in the teacher training course proposed below. Firstly, the newly-recruited teachers in our department are fully fledged English major graduates. On top of their good command of the English language, they are independent learners and, with proper input and guidance, are quite capable of self-development. Even the desire to go on further studies is a big plus here, for it keeps them learning and improving all the time. In her article entitled 'Professional development for the whole staff', Woodward ( 1997: 50 ) comes to the conclusion that:

> Schools are institutions which exist to aid learning in students as well as to make money. If the institutions are full of staff who are learning too, whether alone, in pairs or in groups, and if all staff see each other as capable of learning, then this, I feel, can only enhance the energy of the whole institution.

Secondly, as these young graduates have always been good students, they must also be good teachers, even if only for face's sake. Good students are normally particular about teachers. When they become teachers themselves, they will try hard not to disappoint their own students. Taking into account both the negative factors and positive elements above, I am proposing a teacher training course that starts with the strong for our newly-recruited young teachers.

## Start with the Strong: A Proposed Course

Let us recall Jan Aram's argument for starting with teacher beliefs and listening to teacher voice. The approach allows teachers themselves to bring into a teacher training course what they believe to be effective ways of teaching and through the training course reach a deeper understanding of the underlying principles and after the training course become more conscious agents of principled teaching behaviour in the classroom. This approach is clearly applicable to our teacher training situation. Despite the fact that the newly-recruited teachers start teaching in our department with zero background in terms of teacher training, they all have their own beliefs about effective teaching and good teachers. We offer a one-week intensive teacher training course which falls on the first semester's mid-term labour week when the participants are free. Half a semester's actual classroom teaching experience on the part of participants paves the way for an informed open forum debate about teacher beliefs.

The course is enjoyable because it is motivating. Generally low as it is, professional morale cannot be raised if our young teachers are constantly reminded of their lack of training. They will feel more comfortable with a course that starts with their strengths, rather than with what they lack. With the help of pre-course task questions, participants reflect on teaching strengths and on themselves as teachers and come to the course ready to voice their beliefs in open forum.

The course also provides them with a large amount of input through lectures, workshops, and self-access sessions. Participants are exposed to current theories concerning language acquisition, language teaching methodology, and language teacher education and led into discussion and reflection with reference to those theories. Short as it is, the course manages to supply participants' lack with the most basic and fundamental theoretical training, starting from which participants can carry on further self-studies.

## Course Outline

For lack of space and empirical support, I am here only proposing the rationale and main content of the teacher training course for our newly-recruited teachers with due reference to Wallace ( 1991: 141-164 ) and leaving the details open for discussion and negotiation with the departmental leaders and teachers concerned. As it is a course that starts with the strong, i.e., with teacher beliefs, it has the following pre-course task to start with:

**Pre-course Task:**

Participants are to get prepared beforehand to discuss the following questions at the open forum of the course:

(1) Do you like teaching? Why or why not?

(2) Do you think there is such a thing as effective teaching? If so, what do you feel this is?

(3) Do you think you are an effective teacher? Why? Why not?

(4) What are the main teaching methods you use with your classes and why do you teach the way you do?

(5) Do you want to improve on your teaching and if so, in what areas? How?

**Rationale:**

The course offers participants a chance to bring into the course their beliefs about effective teaching and good teachers and through the course reach a deeper understanding of the underlying principles and after the course become more conscious agents of principled teaching behaviour in the classroom. The course itself is a weak loop to allow participants to experience the reflective approach to teacher development.

**Content and Aims:**

The course has four components:
1. Open Forum – where participants meet each other and hear each other's beliefs as teachers and debate about them. To provide participants with an opportunity to hear

each other's beliefs as teachers and debate about why they agree or disagree with each other.

2. Lectures – where trainers take turns to introduce current theories concerning language acquisition ( with special reference to English as a foreign language), sociology and psychology of language learning, and language teaching methodology focusing on the mainstream communicative approach to English language teaching ( with special reference to ELT in the Chinese context ). To help participants reach a deeper understanding of the underlying principles of language teaching so that they will not only know what is effective teaching but also why it is effective.

3. Workshops – where participants, under the guidance of the returned teachers, discuss teacher development in general and the reflective approach to teacher development in particular and through reflection on their own beliefs and teaching experience work out feasible future plans for self-development. To introduce participants to recent views on teacher development and to discuss their relevance to participants' own experience and situation so that future plans can be worked out for participants' self-development.

4. Self-access Sessions – where participants make follow-up studies of issues arising from open forum, lectures and workshops by browsing among available literature of their own choice. To encourage participants to make use of available literature on English language teaching and language teacher education and to set aside time for participants to explore issues of their own interest.

**Outcomes:**

Upon completion of the course, participants are to write up specific and feasible plans for near future self-development based on Wallace's (1991) reflective model with special reference to their respective teaching areas, e.g., reading, writing, listening, speaking, or grammar.

## Conclusion

What has been discussed and proposed here can hardly be more than superficial and tentative. It is presented so that I can hear comments for improvement. We have to wait and see whether the course will work the way it is designed and we hope it will.

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# LETTER

## SOME THOUGHTS ON REGIONAL TEACHER TRAINERS

(FROM AN FI WHO MAY NEVER FO)

I found the "Eavesdropping" article by the Editor and the "Course Report" by Jean Rudiger in the Spring issue of The Teacher Trainer (Vol. 14 No.1)to be two of the most interesting pieces of commentary this journal has ever published. I have been working on and off as a FIFO (Fly in fly out)teacher trainer in Southeastern and Central Europe for over ten years. Because I am able to follow professional discussions carried out in two of the languages spoken in this region, I have also been able to eavesdrop during countless teacher training and conference events throughout the region.

Based on my experience, I am in strong agreement with the advantages and disadvantages generated by the ELTECS Listserve and reprinted by the Editor. I also agree that UK/US FIFOs continue to be useful in this environment, provided that they come equipped with some working knowledge of the region and are extremely flexible. I would pair these observations with a (modified) quote from Rudiger: "When one is a guest in a culture, one must be careful not to overstep the mark of hospitality. Each country has its own epistemological beliefs and does not necessarily want to take on the beliefs of other countries. While teachers are glad to receive new ideas and to discuss and exchange idea, how these ideas are to implemented must be left to the individual conscience of the indigenous educational culture. To expect anything else amounts to almost a patronising affront to the culture one has been invited to."

Even though I have essentially immigrated to this part of the world, and people constantly refer to me as "our Lisa," I am fully aware that this level of integration is a gift presented to me as a reward for years of reflective listening--in staff meetings, over coffee, at conferences, on the telephone, at the back of classrooms. This gift is actually on loan, however. I could easily lose my unique status if it appeared that I was assuming that I was an expert on teaching issues in these countries by dint of my expertise or length of tenure. Every time I take on an INSET teacher training opportunity, I try to remember that my expertise does not outweigh the fact that I will be working with experts in their own right--classroom teachers who have already developed working solutions to their teaching situation. If I ever have the opportunity to work as a trainer in some other part of the world, I hope to maintain this approach as I learn about my new training environment.

I say all this as background to the comments that follow concerning regional teacher trainers. In my training context, the Board of Education and private school DOSs already use regional teacher trainers (not affiliated with the British Council) who have had training in the UK or US. They are preferred in many training contexts for the reasons mentioned in the ELTECS discussion. In contrast, FIFOs are a popular choice in some training contexts for the following reasons (I don't necessarily agree with these reasons, but they are the ones given):
They provide free language practice for teachers working in isolated areas or who for financial reasons have fewer opportunities to interact with native speakers
They are more likely to be in touch with the latest ELT trends--although some FIFOs I've seen substitute "the latest idioms" for "the latest trends" and get away with it.
Because they are foreigners, they are not as embroiled in the political and personal clashes that are an inevitable part of educational reform, so may be more "impartial" and less likely to play favorites--although some FIFOs like to "shower their blessings" upon trainers they prefer. But when the FIFO Flies Out, their favorites often lose all the support they previously received--occasionally resulting in professional conditions that are worse than before the FIFO arrived.

One of the ways regional trainers and I have managed to balance the advantages and disadvantages of our respective backgrounds is by co-training. In my context, co-training works best if a strict division of trainer responsibility in terms of components is worked out beforehand. A good example of this occurred during a recent three-day workshop for primary teachers on achievement test design and evaluation led by a regional trainer and myself. A month or so before the workshop, the two of us sat down and divided the input into two key areas: the testing guidelines for the new primary school English language curriculum and the related language testing issues that these guidelines raise. We then divided the actual amount of time allocated in the workshop in a two to one ratio, with the bulk of the training focusing on language testing issues and work with test tasks, and official curricular background used as support for the activities carried out during training. I used English to present, give feedback on and discuss language testing issues and work with test tasks, and my colleague used Slovene to comment and lead discussions on interpretation of official policy. Both trainers remained in the room to listen during all presentations, discussions, activities and coffee breaks, no matter what language things happened in.

The teacher response to this approach was overwhelmingly positive. Teachers commented during the workshop that they were developing a much clearer understanding of how to actually implement curricular guidelines in their classes. The co-training element reinforced the notion of joint, rather than exclusive, expertise, especially since the regional trainer felt free to interrupt me during my portion of the workshop and politely challenge what I was doing and why. She admitted to me later that the questions she asked were not necessarily ones that troubled her personally, but rather restatements of questions that teachers often asked her.

In addition, I was greatly relieved to be allowed to abandon my typical role as "native speaker model." Teachers soon became aware that the primary purpose of this workshop was to help them develop their language test design skills, not English language practice. I also became aware of how articulate these teachers were about testing issues when they were allowed to express them in Slovene. If I had forced them to raise these issues in English, my perceptions of what they already knew about language testing would have been substantially different.

In conclusion, these observations are intended to raise the following points:
FIFOs, no matter how assimilated they are to the local culture, will always remain guests and should behave as such.
FIFOs are often most effective when paired with qualified regional teacher trainers, and when clear responsibility for training components is distributed appropriately between them.
FIFOs must be willing to allocate time during training for professional discussion led by a regional trainer in a shared language other than English.

***Lisa Harshbarger***


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# Developing positive working relationships with students: how can trainee teachers on a university course learn from teachers in classrooms?

**Carole Simpson, Yugoslavia**

## Introduction

Pre-service teacher education is increasingly classroom-based, with trainees encouraged in 'reflective linking' ((Malderez and Bodoczky, 1999) between their teaching practice experience and personally constructed theories. Key players in this process are school-based mentors, whose role is not a traditional one of transmitting prescribed teaching methods, but of encouraging this reflective approach. Mentor training courses have been developed in several countries to prepare mentors for this role.

One positive by-product of this trend is the advantages it brings to university-based teacher educators involved in both teacher and mentor education. The danger in PRESETT provision is always of being removed from classroom realities. University lecturers are not themselves working in the day-to-day reality of primary or secondary classrooms, and in fact may never have had such experience. Their own personal theories may exist in a vacuum away from the necessary testing against experience that allows a reflective cycle to be active. However, regular contact with mentors can help to rectify this danger by allowing lecturers 'second-hand' experience with the classroom, and also giving an easily-accessed resource for enquiry into the teaching situation. Of course, an even better situation would be for lecturers to regularly switch between the jobs of lecturer and teacher, as is often done in institutions providing CELTA and DELTA training. This however is not usually feasible in national level teacher education (see Bodycott et.al. (1999) for an account of an interesting exception).

This article describes an example from my own experience as a university lecturer, working both on an undergraduate methodology course and a mentor training course, and cross-fertilising between the two to develop tasks and materials for use with the undergraduate trainees.

The process began with a cry for help from one of the university undergraduates who had been doing some part-time teaching. The lecturer followed this up by seeking responses to the trainee's problem from teachers taking part on a mentor training course. This involved doing some activities with the teachers to develop their own reflective skills. Finally the results of these responses were used as the bases for materials for future use with the undergraduate trainees.

The lecturer was thus acting as an interface or catalyst between the school and university.

The situation described here was the result of a PRESETT methodology project at the University of Belgrade, supported by the British Council. The course was in process of being developed, and extended teaching practice had not yet been introduced. Mentor training courses for experienced teachers had taken place, but the new mentors had not yet started their role of mentoring trainees. Thus at this stage, the mentors and trainee teachers had had no contact with each other, but would have such contact in the future.

This account focuses on four groups of people, and I will use the following terms to avoid confusion:

- Myself, the 'lecturer'
- The group of experienced teachers who are participating in the mentor training course, referred to both as 'mentors' and 'teachers'
- the university undergraduates: 'trainee teachers' or 'undergraduates'
- the school students who are taught by the mentors, referred to by me as 'students' and by the mentors in their writing as 'pupils'.

## Beginning from the trainee teacher: 'the methodology class is useless!'

A university methodology class on teaching reading was interrupted by a trainee in a high state of anxiety. 'The methodology class is useless', she said. 'You can't use any of these methods in the classroom, the students just shout out and ignore the teacher! Tell me what to do!'

Discussion with the trainee after the lesson revealed that she had been doing some part-time supply teaching in a primary school, and had been traumatised by the experience. Enthusiastically wanting to use ideas met in her methodology class, she was faced by a level of disorder in the classroom that meant her whole energy was focused on maintaining discipline, with little opportunity for teaching.

Many experienced teachers will recognise and have experienced this themselves. Teacher development is blocked: there is no chance to practice skills and techniques: personal theories of teaching cannot develop as there is no chance to test theories against experience as there is so little chance for teaching. The new teacher is isolated, with no mentor in place to support her, and feels as though the university course has failed her. She has moved quickly to the emotion of 'informed

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pessimism' (Brandes and Ginnes, 1989). Her experience parallels that found by Richards and Pennington (1998) who investigated 5 graduates of a 3 year BA TESL programme in Hong Kong in their first year of teaching. Depressingly, the graduates abandoned most of what they had covered on the course, and instead focused on their survival in an educational culture that was 'countervailing' to their course, and centred on their role relationship with students and in covering a prescribed amount of course content. Richards and Pennington describe the result as an 'over-simplified' model of the teaching context. A needs hierarchy is in operation: just as human beings need food and shelter to survive, teachers need basic classroom control.

## Exploring teacher experience

Responding to the trainee raises several issues for the university lecturer.

On one level, lecturers know that the trainee is asking the impossible: there is no blueprint, no set of recipes that a lecturer can give a trainee to ensure maintenance of discipline in the classroom. Just to send her on her way does not seem a sufficient response, however.

The trainee's cry for help can contribute to a macro level re-examination of the PRESETT course. This undergraduate has started her teaching experience early, outside the structure of the course, and her situation re-enforces the importance of mentor support for both teaching practice and beginning teaching: with this in place, the trainee would be operating in a framework which allowed for guided exploration of her problem, rather than feeling out of control in a crisis situation. Secondly, this trainee's experience also highlights the importance of student perception of PRESETT's role and objectives, which must include an understanding of the reflective, developmental nature of both learning teaching and teaching. If the trainees see the course's role as one of transmission alone, they will have an unrealistic expectation of how the course can prepare them for teaching. Ways of addressing this have to be built into the course content.

Finally, however, if, as Richards and Pennington note, 'survival' in the classroom is of such priority to new teachers that much else from a PRESETT course is jettisoned on arrival at school, perhaps more course time needs to be devoted to exploring it, and more lecturer time spent on investigating the issue.

A first response on my part, as the lecturer involved, was to address this third issue by using the mentors I worked with as a resource to explore how experienced teachers overcame difficulties in the classroom, and to use their experiences as the basis for sessions with undergraduates. It is this process that I will describe in this article. Other macro-level responses would be part of on-going course development.

This process of interface between mentors and trainees began with activities to help the teachers to explore their experiences, then continued with an analysis of the accounts they produced.

### a. Focusing and externalising

Experienced teachers' skill is largely unconscious, and for outsiders to tap into it, externalising and focusing are needed. In this case I experimented with a 'fantasy' exercise, 'Miraculous Mirror' (Moscowitz, 1978) as a preparation activity to re-capture the experience of being a new teacher. In a regular monthly mentor training session, mentors were asked to visualize themselves as young teachers, and have a conversation with themselves as the teacher they are now. Small groups then shared their experiences, and discussed how they had changed as teachers. After this warmer, the teachers were asked to think about situations with individual students or classes where the working relationship had not been positive, but where the relationship became more positive. They then wrote accounts of two of these situations, which are given in Appendix One.

### b. Analysing

The next stage was to draw common threads from the teachers' experiences. Part of the objective of the mentor training course was to help teachers develop reflective and analytical approaches to their own classroom experience. Thus several activities were carried out to facilitate analysis by the teachers of their groups' accounts. In this article, however, I do not intend to go into further details of these activities, as they formed part of a wider on-going process, but instead recount the analysis done by me, the lecturer.

In my reflections on the teachers' stories, I looked for patterns in their accounts, and tried to place these patterns in a wider theoretical framework. The stories do differ, especially in terms of length, in the amount of detail in the description, and in the amount and depth of reflection. Although the teachers were given the choice of discussing either individual students or classes, the majority chose to describe situations with individual students. However, there were also key similarities in the stories.

The following six threads, many inter-related, stood out in the teachers' accounts:

*Thread one: ability to relinquish ego and exhibit 'non-teacherly' behaviour*

Everybody seems to have a schema for a naughty student / angry teacher scenario: e.g. student throws paper aeroplane, teacher huffs and puffs in indignation says 'How dare you!' and administers six of the best. In the Belgrade mentor accounts, however, the teachers often didn't act as expected in this simplified scenario, even though the student behaviour seemed to flout their authority.

In story one (see Appendix One), a young pupil always stays silent and refuses to answer. Rather than seeing this as a challenge to authority, the teacher 'never insists' on response. In story four, the teacher does not punish the boy who has a wild outburst in class during a dictation, but gives him another chance to do the dictation later. In story seven, the teacher allowed the student to 'put his legs on the desk, sleep during lessons, and participate when it pleased him'.

It is perhaps a sign of security in one's role as a teacher that allows this flouting of norms. The teachers have established their 'teacherly' role with the class as a whole, and in responding to these specific incidents don't respond as expected, because the desired end of developing a positive relationship with the students is more important than their own ego.

For new teachers, who are trying to establish their teacherly role, it might well seem too threatening to act in this way.

And we do also see in the teachers' stories examples of more typical 'teacherly' behaviour. In story three, for example, the teacher gives 'discipline punishment'.

*Thread two: Focus on the learner, not themselves as teachers*
Coupled with the ability to let their own ego be threatened, is the notion that an understanding of the student is the key to creating a more positive working relationship. The teachers show a desire to find out the causes of behaviour, rather than just reacting to it. Thus in story two, for example, a lazy but intelligent student protests in 'rather a crude way' about a bad mark. The teacher sees this behaviour as positive – it must mean the student is ambitious, she does care about her work. After talking to the student, the teacher finds out that she has many problems. In many of the stories the teachers talk to the students and find out they have problems at home. Through the process of discussion and establishing an individual relationship with the student, a start is made to solving the problem.

As Campbell and Wheatley (1983) note, beginner teachers understandably are initially concerned primarily with 'self': these experienced teachers focus firmly on the learner.

*Thread three: giving students work at an achievable level or in a suitable style*
In many of the teachers' stories, the teachers try to solve problems by finding ways of enabling students to achieve something positive. In story two, for example, the teacher discovers that the student is good at writing, and encourages her in this. In stories nine and ten, the teacher prepares individual work for students who normally don't want to do any work in class. In story one, the teacher 'scaffolds' to help a silent child break through to speech. By answering with the child, she breaks the silence barrier.

Similarly, some teachers strive to present work in a style that suits their learners, reminding us of the importance of understanding the width of possible learning styles. In story six, for example, the teacher finds a learning task more palatable to a class in oral rather than visual style.

Thus, in fact, studying methodology, being able to select from a range of methods and techniques, does help in dealing with difficult students and classes, by giving more resources for finding achievable work for students. Sessions on 'teaching reading skills' will be helpful for trainees in the long term, even if they appear of limited use in the short term.

*Thread four: using creativity in reacting to students' behaviour/trying a variety of solutions*
Several teachers reveal their responses to problems are on-going processes. Sometimes they do not know what to do at first, sometimes they try a variety of responses, and as recounted in story nine, 'Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't'.

Story seven is a good example of teacher creativity. Several different approaches to a problem student didn't work until the teacher was inspired by an Australian soap opera. This changed her beliefs about education fundamentally, and she began to behave in the 'non-teacherly' way we have noted above, allowing the student to control the situation because no alternative was possible. Thus inspiration can come from many sources.

Other creative solutions include using song and rhythm to help learn difficult verbs (story six), and using variety, 'Sometimes I just keep silent or stand up. Sometimes I do both' (story eight).

*Thread five: delayed action*
In several of the stories we have seen, the teacher delays their response to the student (e.g. story four). Responses are long term, and involve 'patience' (story ten) and 'time invested' (story two).

*Thread six: response to students at a different 'level'*
It is noticeable in these accounts that the teachers rarely respond in kind to the students – if the students have a noisy outburst, the teachers don't respond by shouting. In many cases (stories two, four and nine, for example) the teacher tries to think of reasons for the student behaviour, rather than just reacting to the behaviour itself. Often the teacher finds there are some outside social pressures affecting the students behaviour, as in story four, where the teacher notes, 'This dictation was a trigger for the boy to 'reveal' his pressures and problems to us'.

This links in with the concept of neurological levels in neuro-linguistic programming. Learning and perception, according to this view, can take place on different inter-dependent levels: environment, behaviour, capability, belief, identity and spiritual. In any individual, these levels are operating at the same time, and affecting each other. Thus, according to O'Connor and McDermot (1996) 'to solve a problem at one level it usually helps to go to a different level'. Owen (1999) describes activities to develop understanding of different levels at play in a situation. Many of the teachers here do look for solutions on different levels: when faced with difficult student behaviour they don't respond to the behaviour, but explore the environment, capability or belief that influenced the behaviour.

## From teacher to trainee: how can the university undergraduate access this experience?

The stories of developing positive working relationships with students written by the Belgrade mentors are not designed to be models for trainee teachers: they are

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samples, and many more samples are possible. Similarly, the analysis in section two is not definitive or exhaustive. Bearing this in mind, how can these stories and analyses be made useful for trainee teachers?

There are several well-documented dangers in this proposed transfer. Firstly, the teachers' behaviour is a result of both their contexts, and their own beliefs as teachers. It is not the intention that this behaviour be replicated by other teachers in other contexts. As we have seen, much of the behaviour, such as giving students work at an achievable level, is the product of experience, which it would be foolish to expect or want new teachers, without this experience, to copy. Also, there is the danger of over-simplification of the teachers' stories to the level of 'motto', sayings that would seem obvious and unremarkable to trainees. Finally, there is the danger of the trainee teachers' attitude to teachers' experience: perhaps because of 'uninformed optimism' (Brandes and Ginnis, 1989) pre-experience students may be arrogant about their future abilities and display a mis-placed judgementalism towards the teachers' stories. For this reason I would avoid any 'what would you do in this situation?' questions.

A further problem could be of trainees feeling dispirited when faced with the weight of potential difficulties in store for them. Also, just hearing what experienced teachers do might make them feel merely 'lectured at' and alienated. Some kind of balance is needed to give the trainees a chance to give their own input, while avoiding the problems of over-simplification just mentioned.

Perhaps what can be transmitted from the mentor to the undergraduate has the nature of a process, not a product. The fact that experienced teachers still have to deal with difficult situations, and that finding solutions is not automatic to them, but part of an on-going process, is an essential message to transmit to trainees. Also, as long as they are not seen as blanket panaceas, the teachers' techniques can become part of the trainees 'bank' to be selected on appropriate occasions.

Most important, however, the stories can be used for awareness-raising activities, to help expand trainees' perceptions, as part of longer-term course aims of building up reflective practice. In Appendix Two there is a sample of activities to use with students in PRESETT sessions, which tries to address these issues. Another possibility is to create activities linking the mentors' accounts to published materials on managing discipline problems, such as in Ur (1996: 259-272).

## Conclusion: university lecturer as inter-facer

Answering a trainee's cry for help in dealing with difficult classes, has to be part of the whole PRESETT course design, including teaching practice and mentor support. For a more specific focus, the experience of teachers can form the base of awareness-raising activities, and university lecturers can provide a vital role through their relationship with mentors in accessing this experience, analysing it and creating tasks and activities for PRESETT sessions.

As part of both PRESETT and Mentor Training, I am trying to encourage the reflective and research skills of both teachers and trainees. However, there are advantages in the lecturer acting as researcher in this case. Firstly, both the lecturer's status and her relationship of trust and respect with the mentors makes it more appropriate for the lecturer, and not the trainees, to elicit stories involving difficulties from them. Also, unlike the trainees, the lecturer hopefully doesn't have an over-simplified view of teaching. This, accompanied by knowledge of background theory, gives the lecturer a broader base than either the trainees or the teachers in analysing the stories. Finally, this same relationship of trust and respect between experienced teachers and the lecturer can ensure that activities designed for trainees to use with the teachers' stories are sensitive and appropriate.

The kernel of the process is, of course, the teachers' experience, and their willingness to devote their free time to exploring that experience.

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## Appendix One

**Mentor accounts of developing positive working relationships with students/classes**

Task: Think about situations with individual students or classes where your working relationship had not been positive, but became more positive. Write an account of two such situations

*These accounts were written by members of the Belgrade Mentors Group, 1998/9, which was organised by the University of Belgrade, the Yugoslav Ministry of Education and the British Council, Eastern Adriatic.*

*They are reproduced with permission.*

**Story One**

The first thing that comes to my mind is one of the first experiences I had as a teacher.

I was working in the pre-school class. The group was large – 38 kids. It was tiring – because I had to change activities every 5 – 10 minutes to keep discipline (the best way of having discipline is to make sure the children are never bored). It was hard work but rewarding. However there was one boy who never said a word. He did everything else (e.g. gymnastics, painting) but when it came to 'What is this?' he kept silent. Whether he was afraid to say anything aloud in English, or whether he was too shy or frightened to make a mistake in English – I do not know. I never insisted. And I always asked him a question when it was his turn, smiled at him and then went on asking other students. One day while he was drawing (they had a drawing dictation since they could not write), I came up to him and whispered confidently into his ear, ' How about next time when I ask a question that you and I answer together? 'A deal?' He nodded. Next time he answered with me, and from then on he started speaking. Since then I have probably worked harder and put more effort into solving problems, but somehow I find this experience the most rewarding. It was 22 years ago. The boy must be a man now. I've never seen him since he left school.

**Story two**

The girl was sixteen. Extremely intelligent and talented, but extremely lazy, with the prejudice that all teachers were the same (not very human). She used to sit at the back of the classroom, not listening to what we were doing. At the end of the first term, she got a poor mark. I did not expect her reaction. I thought she would be indifferent, but in fact she protested in rather a crude way. But still it meant she was ambitious. I talked to her at the beginning of the next term. I told her that her mark was a disgrace for both of us, and asked her if she had any problems I could help with. She opened up – there were many. I suggested she should work at home and bring her homework regularly. When she brought her homework I corrected the mistakes but concentrated on certain things only, and read a few sentences aloud saying how nice they were (and they really were nice). I noticed that she had a talent for writing and encouraged her to write. By the end of the term she had a notebook full of nice essays and compositions. I never forgot to write a comment. At the end of High School she got an excellent mark, and got the top mark at the end of the first year of university. We became close friends and she visits me whenever she comes to Belgrade. Factors: honest evaluation; understanding; time invested. The only comment is that I love my job, it is part of my life. I care about each individual, always remember that I am an adult and that I am responsible.

**Story three**

Recently I experienced something that made me stop and think. Three months ago I started teaching two 5th grade classes (elementary school beginners). From the very beginning the two classes were so different from each other regarding discipline, motivation, friendly atmosphere and working habits. With the first class I had what you may call a very nice teacher-student relationship. With the second class, however, I had nothing but constant trouble. The first class was well organised, motivated, with good working habits. Their attitude towards learning English was positive. In the other class I had serious discipline problems from the very beginning. They were motivated to learn too, but didn't have any sense of class organisation. They would shout answers in chorus, and they created constant noise. I tried to convince them in a friendly way that they should change, but it didn't work at all. Then I invented certain 'discipline punishments'. Those who were constantly disturbing lessons were given different kinds of tests leading to bad marks. On the other hand, I always praised hard-working pupils, and as a reward gave them excellent marks. With that class it worked. The situation is getting better now, though I can't say for how long. However, I had another problem with the first class. During the course of study the students were given the same kinds of tests as the secor 1 class, starting with the easy ones, becoming progressively more difficult. And here comes the surprise! The first class where I didn't have problems, failed, while the second class which gave me those terrible nightmares regarding discipline were quite successful. Now it seems I have another problem – how to make disciplined and motivated students more successful.

**Story four**

Situation: dictation test with eleven year old beginners.

This incident happened a few years ago with 'my class' of fifth form students – I was their form teacher, and this fact influenced my behaviour in the following 'case'. Everything was ready for the serious task of a dictation test – the empty sheets of paper were on the desks and the pencils were slightly trembling in my pupils' hands. Before dictating several short sentences I told the students how to behave – to listen and write carefully, and that I was going to repeat each sentence three times. I also said that there was no need to repeat after me. I started dictating. Everything was all right until the moment when one of the boys repeated the last few words aloud. I just glanced at him, without any intention of reprimanding him for doing that (how could he have known that?). Instantaneously the boy next to him shouted, 'Didn't you hear what the class teacher told us?' The first boy stood up, screwed up his sheet of paper and kicked his chair, shouting, 'I'm going to kill myself, I'm stupid!' For a few seconds I didn't know what to do. I looked at the class. Everybody was shocked. Me too. I managed to collect my thoughts and told him to wait outside the classroom. I finished the dictation (I can't remember if I shortened it or not) and left the classroom to see what happened to the boy. He was there, angry and nervous, with eyes full of tears. When I asked him why he had reacted in that way, he replied that he was afraid of my reaction after repeating the words. At the same time he was very eager to do that dictation because he had practised for it a lot. I promised that we were going to solve the problem and asked him to rejoin the class. It was clear to me that the boy had a psychological problem and that I had to be very careful in approaching it. My decision was not to give him a bad mark for that dictation. In fact I didn't want to punish him (that was, I suppose a personal reaction). I told him that I would give him another dictation.

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PS This dictation was just a trigger for the boy to 'reveal' his pressure and problems to us. With the help of our school psychologist and his parents, we managed to reduce his nervousness caused by family problems.

**Story five**
A student (fifth grade) did not take any interest in my English class. He refused to do the written exercises with all sorts of excuses. One day I asked him to describe all that I was doing in class and say what he liked and what he didn't. He wrote a sort of negative critique. I told him that I appreciated it.

**Story six**
I had a problem with a group of students who refused to learn the irregular verbs from the list. Then I remembered a boy who had told me that he said a little prayer just before he was examined. And this made me try to make the students read the irregular verbs loudly for a few minutes at the beginning of the class. We would read changing rhythm, even singing. The students enjoyed it very much.

**Story seven: A Draw**
So far Stevic has had a difficult life (his father being a kind of ruffian). In the classroom, rarely would anything interest him. In the best case he would sleep through the lesson, in the worst cases argue or bully others (mind you, he is only nine). I tried the 'Will you be my helper?' approach – it didn't work. He could smell coaxing almost at once. I tried bullying— unfortunately he was an expert. Ignoring wasn't successful- he wouldn't let himself be ignored. Consequently I went through several stages: disgust, self-pity, indifference, dispair ... Then I became addicted to an Australian TV programme, 'Heartbreak High' which completely changed my views on education. As a result, I allowed Stevic to put his legs on desks, sleep during lessons and participate when it pleased him. I could see the change in his attitude: one time he offered his hand when he heard I went to a football match. Another time he said to another teacher who was anxious to make him go into the classroom, 'Hang on, I'm chatting with Miss'. It's a no-win situation. I have to come to terms with the fact that if Stevic isn't given his share of controlling the class, he will fight, argue or do whatever to disrupt my lesson. On the other hand he is aware that I could give him the silent treatment if I have had enough.

Moral: look out for Australian programmes.

**Story eight**
If you have a class of 50, it's no use shouting. How can you call the roll in such a class? Trying to waste as much time as they can, pupils sometimes talk loudly at the beginning of a lesson, not allowing you to start. Instead of shouting, you should do something. Sometimes I just keep silent or stand up. Sometimes I do both. And it works.

**Story nine**
Class VIIIa
Problem student:
1. Often not present at lessons
2. If present, doesn't want to do anything
3. At the same time, wants to show off
4. Is strong, so the other pupils are afraid of him
5. Takes drugs

Possible reasons for such behaviour:
1. Family situation [father over-dosed and died; mother is a drug addict who married another drug addict; his sister left the family and went to live with grandparents]
2. Nature of his character

What can the teacher do? What are the most important things in this case?

First: bring him back to the class.
Second: prepare individual material for him, so he can feel he can manage to do something.
Third: organise group work in the class so that he can be a speaker in the group.

I am still trying to do all this. Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't.

**Story ten**
Problem student:
1. Repeating a grade
2. Knows nothing in English
3. Refuses any help

What can a teacher do in this case?
- Be patient
- Involve him in group work, so that he has an opportunity to get help from other pupils, not the teacher
- Prepare easier exercises for him to be done individually, so he can feel he is able to do something
- Give easier homework with more drawings than writing

Results: he is active in the lessons now, but he is still behind the others.

## Appendix Two

**Trainee worksheet: awareness-raising activities for university student trainees**

*Trainees also need a copy of Appendix One.*

**1.** Experienced teachers described how they developed positive working relationships with difficult students/classes. A researcher analysed their accounts and noted five key features.
Read the list of features, and match them with the examples below.

a) The teachers sometimes didn't follow conventional teacher roles
b) The teachers focused on the learners, not on themselves as teachers
c) The teachers gave work that was of a suitable level or of interest, so that the students could achieve something
d) The teachers were creative in trying a variety of responses to difficult situations, and often had to try several solutions
e) Some teachers delayed their response to student behaviour

**Examples:**

1. When a student misbehaved, the teacher talked to the student to see what the reason for the misbehaviour might be.
2. A student crumpled up the paper he was writing a dictation on and rushed out of the room. The teacher talked to him quietly after the dictation was over.
3. A teacher let students keep silent when asked questions, or put their legs on a desk.
4. A teacher got an idea for dealing with a student through watching an Australian soap opera.
5. A teacher prepared individual work for a disruptive student who normally took no part in lessons

**2.** Read **five** of the stories written by experienced teachers. Select **two** of the stories that interest you. Work with a partner who has read the same stories, and compare your choices, and give the reasons why the stories interest you. Together decide which of the five key features above apply to the stories you have selected. Can you identify any further key features of the accounts?

**3.** Look at this list of the logical levels identified by neuro-linguistic programming researchers as being involved in learning and perceiving, and read the following quotation.

**Logical levels:**

Environment
Behaviour
Capability
Belief
Identity
Spirituality

'to solve a problem at one level it usually helps to go to a different level'

(O'Connor and McDermot, 1996)

In which stories do you notice the teachers responding at a different level to the student?

.....

.....

.....

**4.** In the classroom the teacher sees only student behaviour, but this is only a small part of what makes up the student. We can see this behaviour as the tip of an iceberg that is visible above water. Draw an iceberg of a student, writing on it the features that are normally hidden.

**5.** Look again at the stories you selected as interesting. These accounts are written by experienced teachers. Would the situation change if a beginning teacher faced the same problems? If so, how?

# PEOPLE WHO TRAIN PEOPLE

Rena Subotnik is Professor of Education at Hunter College, City University, New York and a lecturer and researcher on the development of elite level talent in maths, science and music.

TW. Rena, what IS elite level talent?

RS. It's talent of sufficient note for the possessor to be on an Olympic team or accepted into the finest music conservatoire or to win a prestigious math prize, for example. There are only a small number of people who maintain sufficient motivation to go through years and years of preparation to get to that level.

TW. Starting at primary school, is the first important thing to spot the gifted child?

RS. An untrained teacher may not necessarily be able to spot one. The stereotype of a gifted child is a child who is very cooperative, has his or her hand up all the time, is very motivated, an excellent student. And gifted kids are sometimes like that but they can also learn NOT to be motivated in school. Other people may not appreciate them putting their hands up all the time. Gifted children can learn too that if they do all their work quickly and well, they'll be given more work and not of the kind they want to do!

TW. Should gifted primary level children get special education?

RS. Ideally, very young children should ALL get an enriched environment. But children who come to school already able to read should definitely have a special education since so much early education involves reading. Once you get to the upper elementary grades some children develop deep passions and they should be able to specialize to some degree, particularly in math and music. Again they may not be easy to spot. Sometimes older kids have a whole life outside school, are the conductor of a youth symphony or something and never speak about it at school.

TW. If a teacher does spot a gifted child, what should they do that is different from mainstream teaching?

RS. Our main messages to teachers are for them to shift their focus to student strengths rather than concentrate on what people do wrong. Then, individualize instruction so that people are challenged enough to keep them interested. When it comes to curriculum and materials there are basically two choices. You can work "vertically" which means working through the normal curriculum more quickly so that the child is, for example, doing calculus at age thirteen. Or you can work "horizontally" which means broadening and enriching the curriculum to include, for example, the history of math or aesthetic math.

*continued* ➔



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TW. Which do you think is better?

RS. Working vertically is simpler, children want it and also in certain fields with rapid trajectories it may be necessary.

TW. Could you give me an example?

RS. Let's take a string player in classical music. They start Suzuki violin at age two or three. Serious practice begins at five. They need to be performing on stage at, say, Carnegie Hall by about twelve to stand any chance of an international career. Music, math and dance are examples of fields that have this special time frame.

TW. Are there any problems about taking gifted students out of mainstream work and putting them in special schools or programmes?

RS. Teachers and parents sometimes think the child will be less balanced, less happy if they specialize. They want them to have "a real childhood" or more time to "hang out". But we have to consider what this really means. Does it mean the child watching two or three hours TV a day instead? And if a child has a real passion and isn't allowed to pursue it, will that make them happy?

A major challenge in our field though is to counsel kids who've been traumatized by being moved from a normal class, where they were the top student and very confident in their abilities, to a selective program, where they may be a mediocre student!

TW. That's counter-intuitive to me! I would have thought confidence would soar and people would feel really special being chosen for a programme labeled "gifted".

RS. Those who think a gifted child should stay in normal school for fear they grow up with an elitist attitude don't realise that if you never challenge the gifted child, they ARE likely to grow up feeling superior. Put them in a program with other kids who are smarter than them and that will soon sort them out!

TW. Okay. Moving up to higher ages again then. What is there to know about working with gifted people after high school?

RS A different sort of training starts. We prepare them for going into a profession, promoting themselves and so on.

TW. Recently I know you've been interviewing children, teachers, administrators and alumni at the Juilliard School, the premiere Western classical music conservatory in the USA. What have you found most interesting from your study of excellence there?

RS. The most interesting thing for me was the use of the audition as an entrance test. It tests a clearly listed set of skills that any good music teacher can train any highly motivated student to achieve. There are no surprises, no secrets, no guessing. Everyone knows exactly what pieces are to be played etc. The academic world, on the other hand, uses abstract tests such as IQ tests where there is surprise and secrecy. The audition allows the student to display something very clearly connected with what they will be doing in the program they are applying to. I'd like to use my study of the conservatoire to inform the academic world. One way would be for the audition to be used as an alternative to IQ or other abstract tests.

TW. I suppose the portfolio combined with an interview is the nearest we could get to it at the moment. How do the staff at the Juilliard spot talent at the auditions?

RS. They told me that there is only one innate component. That is, "musicality", which they define as being connected to music, having a passion for or being caught by the music. They say that everything else is trainable including technique and coordination. They need to have a connection and commitment strong enough to take the student through the hours of necessary practice.

TW. So does motivation thus take care of itself?

RS. Eminent individuals or great performers are often seen to be driven by negative motivation or a desire to prove a point or an "I'll show you!" attitude. It's not necessarily healthy but it keeps them moving. A lot of these people are not "nice" people! To get where they get, they have to focus and sometimes to use people. I think this is why I like this topic! It's not beautiful. It's very human and complicated.

TW. What's the next thing you're choosing to focus on yourself?

RS. The former president of the American Psychological Association Martin Seligman stated that his goal was to focus the association, not so much on the psychology of dysfunction but, on the ultimate in human potential. Giftedness can be viewed as one embodiment of that goal. He has called together a study group. Howard Gardner, David Feldman and Mike Csikszentmihalyi are other members .The group is looking at the relationships between two different geniuses who together create even better work. I've been looking at the relationship between soloists and accompanists (who are both musically and relationally gifted). I want to be able to advise young people, whose personality might not fit the mold or the pressured existence of the visible star, on how they can contribute to great ideas and great performance, leave a mark, yet remain behind the scenes.


## Back Issues

If you'd like to know what articles you've missed in back issues of '*The Teacher Trainer*' send in £8 and a large self-addressed envelope and we will send you an index entitled '*The Story so Far*'.

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# Training the trainers: developing skills in observing and giving feedback for teacher development

**Diana Lubelska, Tracey Gilpin, Angelo Gonzalez, Susana Mayorga and Edith Santillan, UK and Ecuador**

## Introduction

Much has been written on the need for observation and feedback procedures which help teachers to develop. By this we mean observation and feedback procedures which develop the teacher's ability to evaluate his or her own practices (rather than relying on a trainer's subjective judgment as has traditionally been the practice.) Such an approach to observation puts the onus on the teacher to be aware of what she is doing and why, and to find ways of making the teaching-learning process in her as effective as possible. (Freeman, 1990 ; Gebhard, 1990, Johnston, 1991; Maingay,1988, Sheal, 1989) Various writers suggest possible ways this could be done. (Acker, 1990, Scrivener, 1994 ; Wajnryb, 1992, Williams, 1989, Woodward, 1992 ) Much has also been said and written on how to develop trainers' skills in conducting such developmental observation and feedback. (Bowers, 1987, Burke, 1997, McGrath, 1997, Wallace, 1991, Wisniewska, 1998, Woodward 1988, Woodward, 1991, Woodward 1992, various EFLTED, Edinburgh Symposia, UCLES/RSA Conferences and 13 years of The Teacher Trainer). Yet for many trainers a developmental approach to observing teachers is still a new paradigm of observation. To work in this way requires many changes and new skills: changes in roles and power relationships, changes in definitions of 'good teaching', and corresponding changes in interpersonal relations and discourse. The procedure described in this article was designed to give a group of trainers on a trainer development programme a first 'hands on' experience of carrying out developmental observation.

By way of background, the trainer development group were a group of Provincial Co-ordinators of Education from Ecuador. The trainers are part of the CRADLE project, a bi-lateral British/Ecuadorian ELT project. The project aims to improve the standard of English at secondary level in Ecuador through the introduction of new textbooks, communicative approaches to language teaching and wide-scale in-service training and teacher support.

## The need for 'real' practice in observing and conducting feedback

Training in developmental observation and supervision skills is a part of many trainer-training courses. Generally, skills are developed through observation of video-recorded /live classes, followed by discussion, reading, video and role-play. Much can be achieved in this way. These activities constitute a 'rehearsal' of the observation and feedback process, similar to 'rehearsing' of language in an ELT classroom. Such rehearsals provide very useful practice, and for this reason, we use such activities. Nevertheless, we need to go beyond such rehearsals to practising 'for real'. The problem is how to provide trainers with 'real' experience in observing and giving feedback. And how to do so in such a way that neither teacher, nor trainer, would be 'damaged' if the feedback was not skilfully handled. We found a way of giving trainers such practice, using observation of ELT classes in our institution. Other institutions which have, or have access to, teaching and training, can organise similar 'hands on' observation and feedback practice. The next part of this article descibes how we organised the observation and feedback.

## Providing trainers with practice in live observation and feedback

First we would like to clarify the different groups involved. The table below shows the different participants and their differing concerns in the process.

| | |
|---|---|
| Trainer-trainer | Concerned with the development of the trainers' skills in observing teaching & learning and conducting feedback. Responsible for organising the 'hands on' observation & feedback practice for trainers. |
| Trainers | Wanted to develop their skills in observing and giving feedback 'for real'. |
| Teacher + class | Teacher worked with her usual English language class. She wanted some feedback on her work. |

Prior to the live observation experience, the trainers had been introduced to a variety of observation instruments and had practised using them with video-recorded lessons. They had also worked on feedback skills using role-play.

The steps in the live observation and feedback experience are given in the table below in chronological order, together with details of who was involved at each stage. The whole procedure took place over the space of 10 days.

*continued* ►

| STEPS IN THE PROCESS | PERSONNEL INVOLVED |
|---|---|
| 1 Brief chat to explain aims of process and the type of instruments that can be used. | Teacher and Trainer-trainer |
| 2 Trainer provides list of possible focuses for observation (see Appendix 1). Teacher decides on focus for observation: eg. treatment of mistakes. | Teacher and Trainer-trainer |
| 3 Select instrument(s) to collect information on focus (See Appendix 2 for examples); plan how to greet teacher, how to talk to teacher in pre-observation meeting, where to sit (if not directed) during observation, etc. | Trainers and Trainer-trainer |
| 4 Pre-observation meeting for teacher to explain the aims of the lesson and lesson outline. | Teacher and Trainers |
| 5 Observe the lesson and record information on eg. treatment of mistakes. | Teacher & Trainers (& EFL class) |
| 6 Complete, compare, interpret, raise questions about the information from the observation instruments/notes. | Trainers |
| 7 Identify and discuss key points to emerge from observation; plan how to conduct the post-observation discussion in co-operation with teacher. (See Appendix 3 for summary of strategy). | Trainers and Trainer-trainer |
| 8 Post-observation discussion with teacher. | Teacher and Trainers |
| 9 Feedback on the post-observation discussion. | Teacher and Trainer-trainer |
| 10 Feedback on the post-observation discussion. | Trainers and Trainer-trainer |
| 11 Exchange of letters with written reflection on the post-observation discussion. | Teacher and Trainers |

The observation episode was deemed a great success by all of those involved. The next part of this article considers the benefits that each party gained from the procedure.

## Outcomes

We have chosen to begin the outcomes section with the trainers' views. This is because the trainers are the 'learners' in this procedure, and the procedure is intended to be trainer-centred. The trainers found the procedure challenging. Because they come from a tradition of judgmental, trainer-led feedback based on preset categories and standards, they found attempting to work from the teacher's ideas unfamiliar, a little threatening to their position of 'knower' and 'authority' and altogether risky – but they were convinced of the potential value to teachers if they could be non-directive and assist the teacher to explore her own thinking and practice.

## The trainers

The trainers found the experience valuable in a number of ways. They reported that actually carrying out the process of observing and giving feedback 'for real' had been

*"helpful and interesting. I feel terribly encouraged to do this type of classroom observation."*

They enjoyed observing the class and felt quite relaxed about it, though they noted:

*"It demanded lots of concentration, we had to establish a mind gap between what was happening during the lesson, the practical part of the lesson, and our theoretical knowledge about how to describe these things."*

They also highlighted the importance of having practised using the observation instruments with a lesson on video before using them in the live class:

*"Before the class I felt OK. We had practised with the teacher-student interaction form before. But at first to watch the class and complete the observation instrument was difficult for me... sometimes I forgot to write!"*

Delayed feedback was extremely useful as it provided the trainers with an opportunity to pool notes on what they had observed and the issues which emerged from the lesson, this was important in making them feel confident about handling the feedback session.

*"We could realise that it was so helpful for us three observers to put our observations in order together, in order to support our comments about the problems that had arisen with students in the classroom... helping us to feel confident about handling the feedback session. ... It was very interesting teamwork!"*

However, before the feedback session, although they felt confident about the issues they wanted to raise, they felt nervous about how they would get the teacher to talk about the lesson, in particular how to help the teacher explore the lesson if she seemed unable or reluctant to do so.

*"I was a little afraid especially about how to conduct the feedback session, so the only thing I did in that moment was to show the teacher the completed obervation instrument and explain to her what the symbols I had used represented."*

They were also worried about how the teacher might react to what they said. (Normally the feedback would be

held in mother tongue. These trainers had the double burden of a new feedback approach in a foreign language!)
*"I tried to do my best, considering over all not to refuse the teacher's feelings ... a misunderstanding could easily happen, so that I had to be very cautious in the use of language."*

This nervousness was also to do with whether the teacher would be able to identify the area she wanted to develop. (All the trainers' previous experience was of directive classroom observation procedures so although they were aware that the objective in the developmental classroom observation tradition is to help the teacher evaluate and develop her practices herself, at times they still worry about whether teachers will be able to do this!) When the teacher showed herself well able to identify the issues as she saw them, the trainers felt very relieved.
*"When she (the teacher) found her 'mistake' she was a little surprised and immediately she reflected about it, and then told me that in future she will concentrate on that point. Only in that moment I took a deep breath ... This experience taught me how a supervisor's behaviour could be ... "*

Despite the trainers' fears about how the teacher would react, and about their own use of language, after a slightly stiff start, the conversation became quite natural once they showed the teacher what they had recorded on the chart.
*"I was pleasantly surprised when I felt that the teacher was very open-minded. She looked at the instrument and listened to me very carefully."*

This was because the teacher had chosen the topic of focus so she was keen to see what the chart showed; she asked for explanations about items recorded on the chart. The focus of the interaction became the information about student errors, and ways of treating them/ignoring them, rather than the teacher and her behaviour. The trainers were surprised at how clearly the 'learning point' (other ways of helping students) emerged and how easily it was accepted by the teacher.
*"She went to her own reflection about the lesson she gave. She remembered each of the stages and then found out about her untreated error ... when a Japanese student found it simply impossible to pronounce the sound 'sh'. She [the teacher] repeated the sound and word and the student tried repeating again, but she couldn't. So the explanation was not enough for her...She [the teacher] was so aware about the situation, which surprised me, and was interested in the idea of trying a picture of the mouth to teach articulation of this sound next time."*

Particular benefits of the observation and feedback experience mentioned by the trainers were:

**A clearer understanding of the developmental approach** to observation and its possible benefits for teacher and trainer, and of how it differs from their traditional approach.

**Improved confidence**
They feel more confident about carrying out a more developmental style of observation and feedback in the future because they have actually 'done' it successfully live and for real at least once during training (especially as they had managed to do it in a foreign language!)

**Clearer idea of how to get teachers to take responsibility for their own development**
They have a clearer idea of what type of questions assist teachers in thinking about the aspects of a lesson that interest them, and of how such questions help to keep the teacher in charge of the discussion.

**Appreciation of the role and contribution of descriptive observation instruments**
They have become convinced of the value of instruments which collect 'facts' about what happens in a lesson. This is because they have seen how discussion of the facts (rather than the traditional teacher strengths and weaknesses) can take the emotional heat out of the post-lesson discussion and reduce negative feelings, as well as how such instruments can ease the process of identifying the main issues in a lesson. They expect that such instruments will help them open up professional talk with those teachers who so far have been unwilling to recognise that the trainers have anything to offer them.

**Opportunity for self-evaluation of training skills**
The feedback from the teacher on how she reacted to the way the post-lesson discussion was handled was welcomed and was taken very seriously by the trainers because they rarely get feedback on their professional skills.

The trainers identified the following aspects of the design of the training in observation and feedback which they felt had helped them to have a successful experience:
1 The support of working in a group of three
2 The opportunity to conduct a real, live post-lesson discussion with a teacher who they knew would take part seriously
3 The opportunity to conduct a real, live post-lesson discussion with a teacher in a 'safe' environment – that is, in a situation away from their home territories where the fall-out from anything that might go wrong would not re-bound on them
4 The systematic support from the trainer-trainer at each step of the process which made them feel secure

## The teacher

An extra advantage of the procedure was that the teacher felt that she benefited in a number of ways. Particular benefits she mentioned were:

**Opportunity for feedback on teaching**
Although she frequently has observers in her classroom who are there to learn from her, she rarely gains much from the observation herself. She valued the opportunity for feedback on her teaching. Even feedback she might disagree with would be more thought-provoking, and therefore helpful, than no feedback at all.

**Heightened opportunity for professionalism**
Selecting a focus for the observation, and knowing that this was being observed, heightened her own attention to this area of her work and this pleased her.
*"I don't think the observation affected my lesson very much. I'd already planned it before I decided what I would like the observers to look at. However, during the lesson I'm sure that I was more aware of students' errors and how and when I was*

continued

*correcting them. Anything which causes you to examine more closely what you do in the classroom is useful."*

**Something new**

She was fascinated, reassured and provoked to think by the 'evidence' about her class that was presented to her. This kind of evidence was something new for her.

*"The feedback (observation instrument) showed that three students didn't speak very much when we worked as a whole class. I was already aware of this. ... It was interesting to note that another observer had marked down that when the students were working in small groups or individually, I then spent much more time with the same three students. It was reassuring to see evidence that I hadn't been neglecting them throughout the whole class."*

**A 'right of reply'**

She often has observers in her classes but does not know what those who observed her made of the experience or what they tell their trainers.

On this occasion she was involved in the feedback process, and also had the opportunity to feedback herself on the quality and relevance of the post-lesson discussion for her. She was pleased to have a 'right to reply'.

*"Observations by teachers on training courses of one kind or another are so common ...When you start observing classes I think that most people first see only the negative, so I'm sure my observers go back to their trainers with stories of the terrible things I did in my class. ... Usually I get nothing back (because fo the constraints of the timetable, etc.). This time I did, and I was able to give my feedback on the feedback!"*

**Awareness-raising of issues in observation, feedback and teacher learning**

As it happens, the teacher concerned will be working on a teacher-training course later this year and will be in the position of supervising teachers in initial training. This experience was a useful awareness-raising activity for her.

*"I was aware that my receptiveness to the feedback was affected quite considerably by the observers' tone and body language, probably more than any of the information or suggestions they made."*

The teacher identified the following aspects of the design of the observation episode which she felt had helped her to have a successful experience:

1 The power relationship between observee and observers: the people observing and giving feedback had no power over the teacher so she felt safe.

2 Delayed feedback provided time for planning of the feedback discussion by the trainers and the trainer-trainer. The teacher knew this would take place before the post-lesson discussion. She felt reassured that this would prevent overly critical feedback. She feels that this made it easier for her to be open to the trainers' feedback.

*"I think it's important that the trainer takes time to go over the feedback with the observers before it is delivered. This cuts down on over-enthusiastic criticism."*

3 The fact that the teacher knows that the trainers are themselves in training meant that if the feedback was not well-handled, she made allowances rather than feeling upset.

*"I was aware throughout the feedback that my observers are also in training and having been through the same experience myself I know that giving feedback, particularly in a non-threatening way, is not easy. I tried to be open to their suggestions and honest in my replies. As I had asked for feedback it wasn't reasonable to be defensive when it was given. That doesn't mean that sometimes I didn't feel a little threatened."*

## The trainer-trainer

There were a number of benefits from the point of view of the trainer-trainer:

**'Real' practice for trainers**

The trainers developed a good understanding of the developmental tradition in observation through the 'hands-on' experience of the observation and feedback process. They also developed an appreciation of the skills needed for helping teachers to develop.

**High face validity of feedback to trainers**

During the feedback interaction, the way the teacher responded to the trainers was an indication of how skilfully they were handling the feedback. In other words, the trainers received feedback on their skills from a teacher (rather than from a trainer-trainer) and this feedback was perceived as very valid as it was given by a 'customer'.

**Accurate feedback on trainers' understanding and skills**

The feedback planning session, the review of the feedback session with the teacher, and the review session with the trainers, offered opportunites for the trainer-trainer to evaluate what the trainers had assimilated, what they could handle and where they might still need to do further work on skills.

**Opportunity for trainers to self-evaluate**

Later, after the feedback interview, in conversation with the trainer-trainer, the trainers had an opportunity to self-evaluate their skills. It was important that Step 9, the discussion of the feedback between teacher and trainer-trainer, took place before Step 10, the session between the trainers and the trainer-trainer. Step 9 allowed the trainer-trainer in Step 10 to explore with the trainers any differences of perception between their view of how the feedback with the teacher went and the teacher's view of it.

**More positive teacher-attitudes towards being observed**

Sometimes teachers are reluctant to be observed – and this can be a problem for trainers (and trainer-trainers) who need their co-operation to carry out their work. Our experience was that a teacher who chooses the focus of the observation, the instrument used and who receives useful feedback, is a teacher who is more willing to be observed again in the future.



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## Conclusion

In this article we have described a procedure for organising practice in observing teaching and giving feedback which was very helpful for all the participants – trainer-trainer, trainers and teacher.

For the teacher, it gave her feedback on her practice and insights into how the interpersonal elements of the feedback interview influence teachers' ability to be open to change.

For the trainer-trainer, it gave her a clear picture of the trainers' individual understanding of developmental observation, and their ability to carry out such observation and feedback in practice.

For the trainers it left them enthusiastic about a new way of supporting teachers, and helping them develop their practice. At the same time, the trainers were able to develop a realistic picture of the demands the approach makes on them in terms of changes in power and status, changes in thinking about the nature of good practice, and changes in recording and using information from observation.

*[We would like to thank our colleagues Ross Lynn, Katy Salisbury and Rod Bolitho for their helpful comments on the draft of this paper.]*

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(Examples of observation foci, observation instruments and feedback questions available on request from the editor.)

**Journal Exchanges**

"The Teacher Trainer" has arranged journal exchanges with

IATEFL Newsletter (UK)
English Language Teaching Journal (UK)
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and is abstracted by 'Language Teaching', The British Education Index, the ERIC clearing house and Contents Pages in Education.

# EFL and Conflict Resolution: What a Combo!!!

By Elliott Swift, PhD, Croatia.

## INTRODUCTION

English teachers, especially those in secondary schools, are continually faced with a variety of challenges: "How can I help to resolve disputes in my classroom?" "What can I do to make English skills practice more relevant and interesting?" "How can I prepare my students for dealing with life's conflicts?" This article, based largely on Zimmer (1993) and Zeigler, Jr.(1997) will suggest that conflict resolution through the mediation process may be the answer.

During the last twenty years, the level of student violence in American schools has led to the introduction of classroom conflict resolution programs designed to teach students how to resolve interpersonal disputes through mediation. In an 1996 article by Johnson and Johnson, "Conflict Resolution and Peer Mediation Programs in Elementary and Secondary Schools: A Review of the Research," the research confirms that the mediation process has been successful in reducing conflicts between students and improving the overall behavior of a school's student body. The study also found that students' "psychological health and self-esteem tend to increase...and that the integration of conflict resolution training into English literature units tends to increase students' academic achievement."

**What Is Mediation?** Mediation is a process designed to help resolve conflicts between two individuals (sometimes called "parties" or "disputants"). Those who agree to have their dispute mediated usually do so because they want to maintain their relationship with the other party and don't want to spend the time, money, and emotional energy in litigation.

**Why Does Mediation Work?** Unlike litigation which pits the two parties against one another, mediation is a process in which the two parties, with the help of a mediator, cooperate in finding a solution to their problem. From a psychological standpoint, the "talking out" of the problem can be therapeutic and the collaborative process generally smooths the path to compromise. By placing the responsibility for solving the dispute on the parties involved (empowerment), the parties have a direct stake in the outcome and tend to work to bring about a resolution of the problem.

**Why Use Mediation As An English Language Activity?** Mediation is a theme- and task-based activity, in which emphasis is placed on critical thinking and creativity; it is also inherently relevant and enjoyable and can involve the entire class simultaneously. From the teachers' point-of-view, the mediation process is rich in possibilities for integrating various aspects of English. For example, the story and the role-play writing assignment can include the use of direct quotations, indirect speech, tenses, etc.

***The Four Session Procedure***

When using mediation as a language learning activity, the following four types of sessions are required: explanatory, reading, mediation, and analysis.

**1.The Explanatory Session.** During this session, you explain what mediation is, why it is an important method of resolving conflicts, why you believe it is a valuable English language learning activity, and the steps in the process. All this I'll explain now.

***The Teams*** Begin by dividing the class into mediation teams and placing the teams in designated areas, as far away from each other as possible. (Depending on your situation, you may give the students the opportunity to choose the teams.)

There are several ways to structure a team. Each team may consist of two (or four) individuals in the dispute, one, two or three mediators, and one or more observers. One important objective is to involve as many students as possible; by increasing the number of observers, disputants and mediators, the entire class can participate simultaneously.

The advantage of pairing up people in this way is that a student who isn't very proficient in English or who is shy can be paired with a more proficient or outgoing student.

The bottom line is that you can structure the teams in whatever manner maximizes the opportunity for student participation and the efficient use of time.

***The Roles*** Each member of the team has a different role to play. The disputing parties act out the story of their disput (See below). The mediators help the disputimg parties to resolve their dispute by following the seven-step mediation procedure. (See below)

The observers watch the acting out of the story and the sebsequent mediation and take notes on the quality of the participants' use of English: grammar, usage, pronunciation, and discourse fluency. During the post-mediation analysis, the observers lead in the discussion of the quality of the participants' English and what the participants learned as a result of their mediations. The teacher serves as a facilitator and guide during this later session.

Ideally, every student should have the opportunity to play each role; disputant, mediator, observer.

***The Story and Role-Plays*** After choosing and positioning the teams, you can then discuss the story and role-plays. A story is a scenario of what provoked the conflict. Usually, the story can be told in twenty lines or less and that should be the goal, "brevity being the soul of wit." An example is given below.

The role-plays are written from each party's perspective of what happened, why they behaved as they did, how they feel, and how they would like to see the conflict resolved. Each role-play can generally be written in twelve lines or less. Again, an example is given below.

The first time you work through a mediation session you can provide a story and role plays yourself. Later on, the students can choose to write the story and role-plays about an interpersonal conflict they have experienced, an imagined conflict, or a dispute that they read about in a newspaper or magazine. Writing about a personal experience often has therapeutic value and is the easiest approach because the student knows the story and at least one role-play (his/her own side of the story). Writing an imagined interpersonal conflict scenario is enjoyable, creative, more challenging, but still relatively easy.

The third option, writing about a community conflict that the student read about in a newspaper or magazine is the most difficult and time-consuming approach, but a valuable way of increasing student involvement in civic education. To write a story based on an article, the student must find an appropriate article, transform it into a story and role-plays in English (if the article isn't already in English) and add any information that would make the story more appropriate to the mediation. Usually students who opt to write about a community dispute have an interest in the specific issue (e.g., the environment) or about politics in general.

In my experience, in the vast majority of cases, the students will opt to write about their own conflict experiences.

***An Example of a Story and Role-Plays*** To provide an example of a story and role-plays and to demonstrate how the mediation process works, you can make copies of the following Dana/Zora story and role-plays, distribute them to the students, and take a team of students through a "dry-run" of the mediation process.

The Dana/Zora Story: On Monday, Dana asked Zora if she could borrow Zora's English book. Since Dana was her best friend, Zora agreed, but asked Dana to return the book on Wednesday. When Zora asked Dana for her English book, Dana told Zora that she couldn't find it and didn't know what could have happened to it. Zora got angry and told Dana that she should buy her a new book. Dana said that the book must have been stolen, that it wasn't her fault, and, anyway, she doesn't have enough money to pay to replace the book. Zora and Dana started arguing. A teacher separated them and suggested that they mediate the dispute.

Dana's Role-play. You asked Zora to lend you her English book. She's your best friend and she agreed. You took the book to the library on Tuesday to study. After studying, you think that you put the book in your bookbag. Before you left the library, you went to the bathroom. The next day, you looked in your bookbag, but the book wasn't there You really felt bad and guilty about the missing book. But when you told Zora about the missing book, she said that you should pay to replace it. You don't think that you should have to pay for a book that you think was stolen. Anyway, at the time, you didn't have the money to buy Zora a new book. When you told her you couldn't replace her book, she got angry and said some mean things to you. Now, you can't stand her.

Zora's Role-play: When you asked for your book back, Dana said that she didn't have it. When you asked her politely to buy you a new book, she said that the book must have been stolen, and she didn't think she should have to replace it. You think that it doesn't make any difference whether the book was lost or stolen, Dana should replace it. You can't understand why your best friend would not be willing to replace your book. You really feel bad.

After explaining the story and role-plays, discuss the following seven phases in the mediation process.

**The seven phases of the mediation.**

**I. "The Introduction."** At the beginning of the first mediation session, ask the mediators to sit on one side of the mediation table and the parties on the other; this will underscore the point that the parties must act as a team to resolve their conflict. Ask the observers to sit to the side of the mediation table. After the mediators introduce themselves and explain what mediation is and their role, they read the following ground rules to the parties, who must agree to abide by them before starting the mediation process:

1. the parties must remain seated during the mediation; 2. the parties will take turns telling their stories to the mediators; 3. during the story phase, the parties will focus on exactly what happened (without exaggeration) and what they would like to see happen to resolve the dispute; 4. no party will interrupt while another party is speaking; 5. a mediator or one of the parties may ask for a "recess" to discuss a possible solution in private or to take a break (to go to the bathroom, etc.).

(To expedite matters, the ground rules can be written on the board, and the mediator can simply ask the parties to read them and state whether they agree to abide by them). **Allot five minutes for this phase.**

**II. "The stories."** In this phase, the parties alternate in telling what they think happened, how they feel and what they want. The parties can choose who will go first; if no agreement is reached, a mediator can flip a coin.

continued

***As the parties tell their stories, the mediators and the parties who are not talking should be taking notes on what parts of the other parties story that they agree and disagree with in preparation for the questioning phase; this is a VERY IMPORTANT part of the process.***

When both parties have told their stories, the mediator and each party can ask questions to clarify aspects of the two stories. If a mediator doesn't understand something a disputant has said, the mediator should attempt to clarify the statement by paraphrasing back what she understood the party to mean (e.g., "If I understand you correctly, you mean..."). **Allot ten minutes for this phase.**

**III "Identifying the points of agreement and disagreement."** During this phase, the mediator reads the points of agreement and disagreement and asks the parties if they agree that what she has read is correct. If the parties agree, the mediators go on to the next stage; if the parties don't agree on a point, the mediators seeks clarification. **Spend five minutes on this phase.**

**IV "Role reversal."** This stage of the process involves the parties taking the role of the other person and telling the "story" from the "other person's point-of-view." By "stepping into the shoes" of the other person, both parties gain fresh insight and empathetic understanding. **Allot five minutes for this phase.**

**V "Possible solutions."** In this phase, the goal is to encourage the parties to generate possible solutions to the conflict by brainstorming. In brainstorming, the mediators ask the disputants to write down a list of ideas for solving the conflict as quickly as possible, without regard to whether the ideas make sense.

If the parties get stuck, a mediator might say: "If you could devise the perfect solution, what would it be?" The mediators must exercise patience and stimulate the disputants to come up with ideas.

However, if, after the mediators have given the disputants a significant amount of time to write down their ideas, and neither has written down a solution a mediator has thought of, the mediator might offer her suggestion and then ask the parties if she could add it to the list. **Allot five minutes for this phase.**

**VI "Discussing the possible solutions."** After the parties have their lists of possible solutions, they are asked to discuss each other's ideas in terms of practicality and consequences. Some of the questions that mediators could ask to help the process along include: "Do you think it would be possible to carry out your idea?" "If your idea was adopted, what would happen?" "If you were Dana (the other person), how would you feel about your idea?" Through this discussion phase, the parties examine different ideas in order to reach a mutually satisfactory solution. **Allow ten minutes for this phase.**

**VII "The agreement."** When the parties have reached a verbal agreement on a solution, the agreement should be formalized in writing: in language which indicates who, what, where, when, and how the conflict is to be resolved. Often, the parties include in the agreement a statement that if the terms of the agreement are broken by either party, both parties agree to return to the mediation table.

For the purposes of this activity, it is enough that the parties list what is to be done and when it is to be accomplished.

Towards the end of the explanatory session, ask all the students to write a story and role-plays, and bring them to the next session. Tell the mediators that a copy of the seven-step mediation process and ground rules will be placed on reserve in the library; ask them to make a copy of the ground rules and mediation process and bring them to the next session.

**2.The Reading Session.** At the beginning of the session, ask the team members to read each others' stories and role-plays aloud, then choose one of the stories to mediate (A typical story and role-plays should take about three minutes to read). Towards the end of the session, ask the parties and mediators to prepare for the mediation session by: 1. reviewing the ground rules and steps in the mediation process; 2. bringing a "Points of Agreement and Disagreement" sheet of paper to the mediation session: ( The paper should have a line down the center of a sheet and a perpendicular line dividing the paper into two halves. Whoever is in charge of preparing the sheet should write the names of the parties at the top at the top of the sheet. Under the names of the disputants, he should write "Points of Agreement," and under the perpendicular line write "Points of Disagreement;" this will facilitate note-taking).

**3.The Mediation Session.** As soon as class has assembled, the teams who are designated to present the mediation begin the seven-phase mediation sequence. Once the students have begun the mediation, circulate among them and note any English language problems that need attention.

**4.The Analysis Session**

After the mediation sequence has been completed, the team observers lead the class in a discussion of the quality of the mediation experience and the participants' English.

Variations.

- If you are an elementary school teacher and want to try mediation with younger students, the process can be simplified and carried out during one class period with the teams mediating simultaneously. After choosing the teams, hand out stories and role-plays that you have written and made copies of, and ask the mediators to follow these steps: 1. ask the parties what they want and how they feel; 2. reverse roles; 3. brainstorm; 4. discuss the practicality of the ideas; 5. agree on an idea; 6. shake hands.

***The Time Frame*** If you are like most teachers, you don't have much extra time to introduce material outside of the

curriculum to your students. However, if you agree that your students would benefit by integrating mediation into your teaching, there are a number of ways of doing so.

One out of class option is the formation of a "Mediation Club.". The club members could meet at designated times, learn the mediation procedure, and then be available to help fellow-students resolve disputes.

A second option would involve having two mediation teams mediating simultaneously while the rest of the class, divided into two sets of reporters (each set assigned to one mediation team) would take notes on the mediation and write a newspaper article on the nature and outcome of the mediation.

Another option would be to divide the class into mediation teams having the teams carry out a mediation simultaneously.

(Of course, you probably can think of other ways to integrate mediation into your teaching and how best to design the mediation teams. A lot will depend on the behavior of the students. If you have students who can carry out a simultaneous mediation without disturbing the classes next door, then that may be the best option. I've used the second option, and that seems to work well. But, again, it's up to you).
Evaluation.

In all cases, you would circulate and note English language problems. If you choose to use this activity as an evaluation tool, you will need to establish criteria for the students' use of English or the quality of their participation or both. In evaluating the quality of the students' participation, Zimmer uses an six-part evaluation scheme for each phase of the mediation: highly effective, effective, somewhat effective, somewhat ineffective, ineffective, highly ineffective. An important advantage in evaluating or grading the work is that the students will tend to take the process more seriously!

## Conclusion

The use of mediation in teaching English is a new approach, but one that clearly has the potential to be an exciting way to help students deal with interpersonal problems, increase their interest in community affairs, and practice the four skills. I hope you agree and will give it a try. Happy mediating!

## References


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# PUBLICATIONS RECEIVED

In this column, publications which have relevance to modern language teacher trainers are swiftly described so that you can tell if they are interesting enough for you to read or buy.

## BOOK SERIES

A series of A4 sized resource books for primary teachers has been brought out by OUP and series edited by Alan Maley. Each book contains 60-100 primary class activities in recipe format, photocopiable worksheets and teacher guidance. Titles are:

**Young learners** by Sarah Phillips (1993) ISBN 0-19-437195-6

**Very young learners** by V.Reilly & S.M.Ward (1997) ISBN 019-437209-X

**Games for children** by G.Lewis & G.Bedson (1999) ISBN 0-19-437224-3

**Projects with young learners** by Diane Phillips et al (1999) 0-19-437221-9

**Drama with children** by Sarah Phillips (1999) ISBN 0-19-437220-0

## INDIVIDUAL BOOKS

**Cracking creativity** by Michael Michalko. (1998) ISBN 0-89815-913-X Ten Speed Press (Distributed in the UK by Inspiration Resources). Each chapter of the book takes a different creative-thinking strategy showing how it's worked for creative geniuses (such as Leonardo da Vinci, Martha Graham etc) and provides exercises to help readers put it to work in business and personal life. The text is livened up with anecdotes, diagrams and occasional green print. A slightly jerky but interesting read.

**Correction** by M.Bartram & R. Walton (1991) ISBN 0-906-717-91-4. LTP. The book describes the development of the authors' ideas on four basic questions: Should I correct? Why? When? How? It's designed to help teachers consider their own attitudes and classroom behaviour. Useful for pre- and in -service courses. Easy to read because of its large print, short sections and charitable attitude.

**On becoming an innovative university teacher** by John Cowan (1998) ISBN 0-335-19993-3. Open University Press. Each chapter poses a question ( e.g What is meant in education by "reflecting"?), answers it with a series of examples and closes with second thoughts which include viewpoints different from the author's. Aims to help university teachers plan and run innovative activities to enable their students to engage in effective, reflective learning. Recommended.

**Teaching English in Spain** by Jenny Johnson (1998) ISBN 1-873047-12-6. In Print pubs. A practical teaching manual and living guide telling you how to find a job, sort out visas, travel and accommodation and make the most of living and teaching in Spain. Addresses, phone numbers, specifically Spanish language problems and short interviews with ex-patriate teachers in the appendix.

**High-risk children in schools** by R. Pianta & D.Walsh (1996) ISBN 0-415-91622-4. Routledge. Using systems theory and developmental psychology, the authors present the "contextual systems model" a new framework for the study and education of children at risk (the bottom 20 percent) Contains demographics and critiques of present explanations of risk. USA based.

**The Achilles syndrome** by Petruska Clarkson (1994) ISBN 1-86204-263-2. Element Books. A large discrepancy between what we actually achieve and what we think we are capable of can course anxiety and stress. This book offers case studies, help and advice. So, if you're acknowledged as a winner but feel like a loser, this book is for you!

**The discourse reader** Eds A. Jaworski & N. Coupland (1999) ISBN 0-415-19734-1. Routledge. Planned as a degree level teaching text this integrated and structured set of 34 writings focuses on linguistic, interactional, textual, social and cultural issues. The contributions (including ones by Austin, Grice, Cameron, Labov, Malinowski, Goffman, Tannen, Foucault) work chronologically from the origins through methods to applications of discourse analysis. Thick, small print. You'll need stamina.

**Evaluation** by P. Rea-Dickins & K. Germaine (1992) ISBN 0-19-437138-7. OUP. The nature, principles and practice of evaluation. Sections on what it is, purposes, how we can evaluate curricula, projects, methods, materials, teachers, learners in a principled and systematic way. Very slightly dated but still excellent background reading.

**The academic career handbook** by L. Blaxter et al. (1998) ISBN 00-335-19827-9. Open University Press. Designed for those working or hoping to work within the higher education system, this book emphasises staff development and offers guidance on networking, teaching, researching, writing and managing as well as getting published, obtaining research funding and seeking promotion.

**A teachers' grammar** by R.A. Close (1992) ISBN 0-906717-48-5. LTP. A revised edition of Close's "English as a foreign language" which argues that the grammar of English is a matter of relatively few but quite powerful distinctions including that between objective grammar as Fact ("children" not " childs") and subjective grammar as Choice ("I live/am living in Kent" are both possible).

**The guide to languages and careers** by A.King & G.Thomas (1997) ISBN 1-87401686-1. Designed for modern languages students, parents, teachers and career advisors in the UK, this indeper dent guide from CILT provides course and careers info for post- 16 and post- 18 year olds. Includes advice on study and work abroad and a useful book list.

**Dictionaries** by Jon Wright (1998) ISBN 0-19-437219-7. OUP. 80+ ideas written up as recipes for making effective use of dictionaries both as a reference tool and a language learning resource. Sections on getting started, headwords, meaning, vocabulary development, texts for integrated skills work and bilingual dictionaries.

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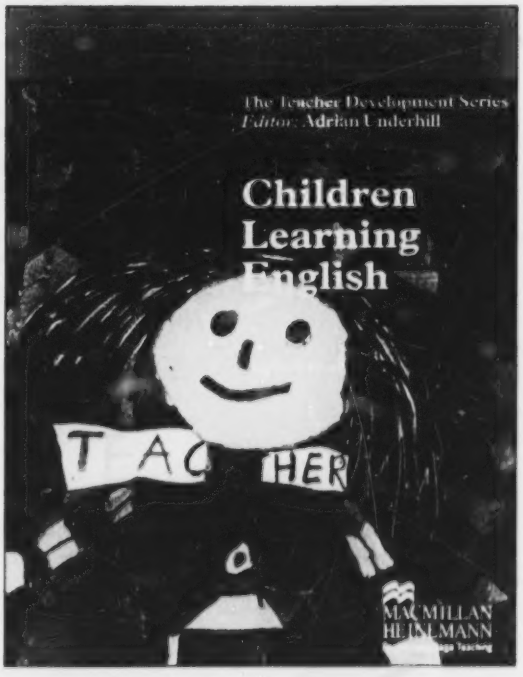


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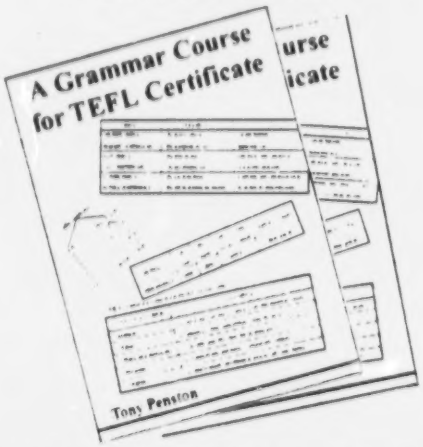


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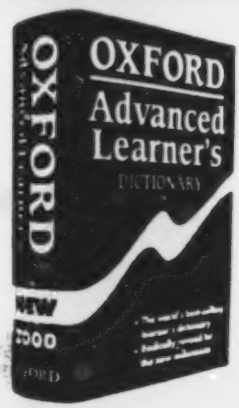


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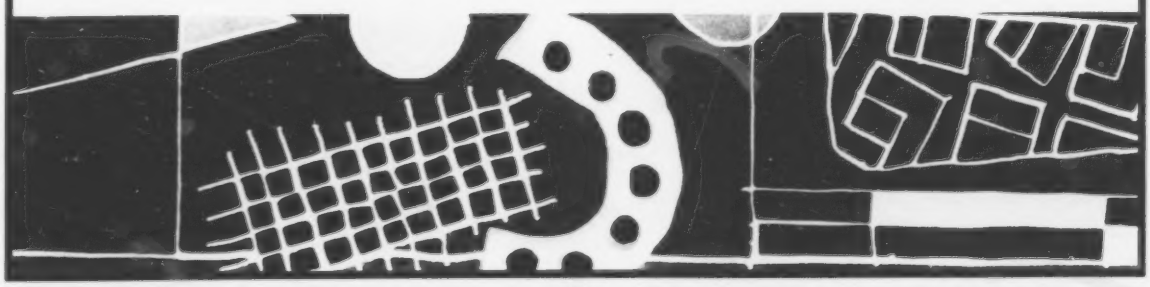

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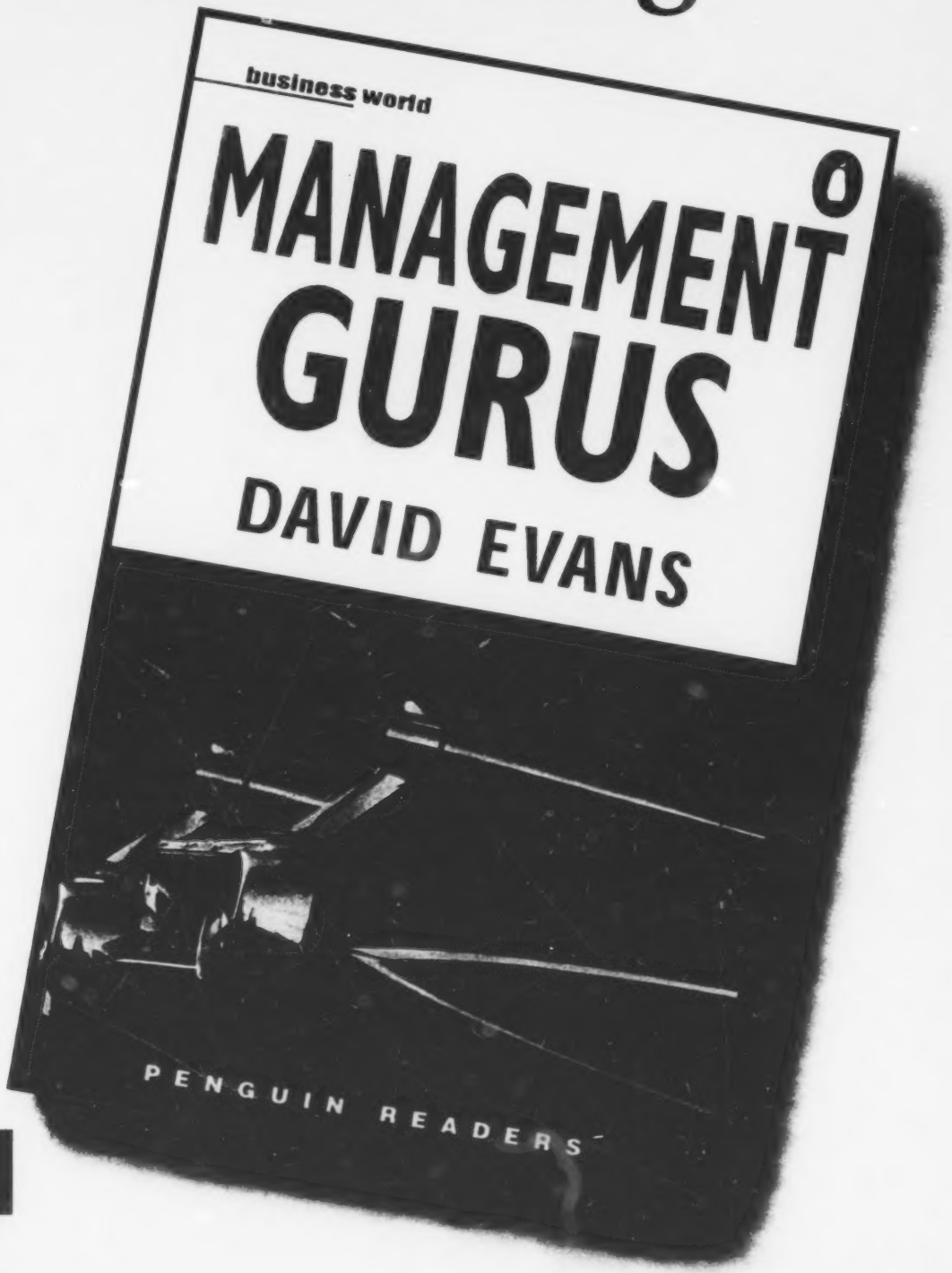


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# Editorial

Welcome to a wide variety of articles in this, the last issue of Volume Fourteen!

In my continued concern to include as many different voices as possible in the journal, we have two "Trainee voices" columns this time. The first (p3) describes how a group of teachers writing dissertations for a B.Phil degree were supported by their own colleagues and seniors as well as by the course supervisors. The second (p18), about writers' block, shows why this kind of support is so essential.

Collaboration is a key theme in another article (p22). In Slovenia, native and non- native teachers work with the same language class and gain enormous benefits from this (p22).

The issue of trust comes up in all kinds of ways on an in-service training course for non-native speaker teachers in Thailand (p6) while awareness, assembly, accessibility and amusement are the four principles used to tempt the reluctant to workshops in Japan.(p9).

Interspersed between these articles are some short, interesting pieces. One is on using crosswords for training (p11). One is on trying to train trainers with little English, teaching or training experience in five days in Peru! (p13) . You'll find the story of Trainerella (p15) and can find out what BIELT is (p16). You can also learn how to be doubly amused by the things your friends say (p21). I've included a wonderful way of working on language, using reproductions of famous paintings (p24). I've even managed to squeeze in a page of book descriptions (p26). So, a full issue indeed!

Finally, I'd like to ask you to stay with us in the year 2001. Help us to stay strong by re-subscribing and to grow stronger by showing your copy of the journal to others, suggesting they read it, contribute and subscribe. And let us know the names and addresses of friends you think would like to hear about us.

We need you!

All good wishes

Tessa Woodward.

The Editor

## Would you like to send something in to "The Teacher Trainer"?

"The Teacher Trainer" is designed to be a forum for trainers, teachers and trainees all over the world. If you'd like to send in a letter, a comment, a cartoon, a taped conversation or an article sharing information, ideas or opinions we'll be very happy to receive it. If you would like to send us an article, please try to write it in an accessible non-academic style. Lengths should normally be 800 – 4,000 words. Send your first draft in on paper typed in double spacing with broad margins. Your article will be acknowledged by pro-forma letter. Once you have had comments back later and have finalised your draft in negotiation with the editor, we will ask you to send us three hard (paper) copies and if at all possible a floppy disk (micro 3½" or 9cm). **Your article needs to be saved on the disk as a Microsoft Word (98 or lower) or as an ASCII file**. Keep your headings and sub-headings in **upper and lower case throughout**. Finally, please give an accurate word count. We try to publish your article within about five issues, but if it is an awkward length it may be longer. It will be assumed that your article has not been published before nor is being considered by another publication. We look forward to reading your article!

# Peer tutoring as co-operative learning

**Jane Spiro: University College of St. Mark and St. John, UK**

**Kora Basich: Director Language School UABC Mexicali, Mexico**

This article describes an initiative in which a group of teachers writing dissertations as part of a teacher development B.Phil. programme were supported by their own colleagues and seniors at work, as well as by their course supervisors..

## Who are we and what was the project?

Three groups of people were involved in this initiative: the official supervisors and course leaders in the B.Phil. and M.Ed. programmes, M.Ed. students who were senior graduate teachers of English in Mexican universities, and B.Phil. students who were their colleagues. It was our good fortune that the B.Phil. and M.Ed. for one module ran side by side, in parallel rooms. This gave us the perfect opportunity to set up a peer-tutoring project for the dissertation process. The project involved undergraduates selecting seniors to support them in the dissertation writing process. This support could be formal, informal, academic or pastoral – whichever tutor and tutee chose. To describe the project, we are using the voices of the three key participants, derived from interviews, questionnaires, and letters to course tutors written before, during and after the tutoring process.

## Why did we set up this peer tutoring?

The term 'dissertation supervisor' conjures up the idea of many different roles, and not all of these very happy ones for the supervisor: facilitator, guide, mentor, but also assessor, judge and 'overseer'. These roles are particularly problematic in the fragile creative process, where the writer crucially needs room to 'talk through' ideas without constraint, and to make and resolve mistakes for him/herself.

**Official supervisor**

"My own tutorials, and those with local tutors, took place at appointed times and during structured taught modules. However, I was aware that many students had problems and anxieties beyond those which could be dealt with in so structured a time frame.

For example, several teachers had no writing background, even in their mother tongue, and felt insecure, blocked and lacking in confidence. As official tutor, too, I felt some trainees might be inhibited by my 'assessor's' role, and might empathise more with a peer, particularly one who had recently been through the same process as himself or herself."

**Peer tutor**

"We had just been involved in an M.Ed. module that focussed on counselling skills. We had considered ways of listening supportively, eliciting and developing trainee responses and ideas, and offering guidance without being directive. Tutorials with our peers offered an ideal opportunity to apply these skills to the counselling and support of colleagues, many of whom we knew from our work contexts but had never worked with closely.

Knowing the tutees personally and professionally also helped: we knew their working contexts well, and so we could help them to set up action plans, think about time management, narrow topics to match the regional context, provide practical tips, and could suggest useful contacts and help build self-confidence."

**Peer tutee**

"I saw in the peer tutor someone who had just been through the dissertation work not long ago and had been successful. It helped to know they had succeeded in the task, that it could be done within our busy working lives. It also helped to see that work they had done for the B.Phil. was actually influencing their practice as teachers and trainers. It confirmed the value of the whole project."

## What were initial reactions to the idea of peer tutoring?

**Official supervisor**

"I was concerned that there seemed to be some negative reactions to the project. Some of the tutees felt I was abandoning them, and I actually found it difficult to abdicate responsibility. I felt the need to overprepare my tutees, so they would have maximum benefit from tutorials . I was also apprehensive as to whether their negative responses would be resolved."

**Peer tutors**

"Most of us were a bit reluctant, thinking we did not have the expertise to help the undergraduates. We had low self-confidence. On the other hand, we were all willing to make the most of it, thinking it would really be a learning experience for both groups. We feared we might fail as tutors, not be of real help, even confuse the tutees or not know enough about the dissertation topic."

**Peer tutors**

"Some of us felt that this tutoring system would be of more benefit to the peer tutors than to us. We knew they wanted to practice their counselling and tutoring skills, and we feared we were just the 'guinea pigs'. Also, some peer tutors were people we knew from our workplaces: if they hadn't helped us before, why should it be different now?"

## How was the pairing set up?

**Official supervisor**

"At first, the M.Ed. tutor and I tried to match the interests of the M.Ed. participants with the tutees' dissertation topics. Then we discarded the idea of making the matches ourselves, and designed a matching system that gave the participants themselves complete freedom to make their own choices. Our only intervention was at the final stage when we facilitated the self-selected 'matches' by drawing up a timetable of meetings."

continued →

**Peer tutor**
"We were presented with a list of undergraduate dissertation topics and invited to choose one or two that interested us."
**Peer tutee**
"We had already chosen our own topics, and gone quite far in initial reading, planning and brainstorming our ideas. So most of us looked for peer tutors with a common or complementary interest. We were presented with a list of topics our peer-tutors were interested in, or topics of dissertations they had written themselves as undergraduates. In some cases, we also had samples of their work to read. Based on that, we chose whom we would like to work with. Sometimes we chose someone not because of their interest areas at all, but because we already worked well with them, or liked them personally."

## How did we prepare for the peer tutoring?

**Official supervisor**
"I prepared the tutees by making clear the scope and structure of a typical dissertation, and meeting them all several times to establish a working title. During these meetings, we worked together to draw up initial chapter outlines, a working booklist and an abstract; all these could be a starting point for their first tutorial."
**Peer tutors**
"Before the tutoring began, we practised Heron's six-category intervention analysis (1), and Edge's nine co-operative development techniques (2). We had also practised strategies for supportive listening and counselling, such as body language, supportive noises, elicitation techniques, ways of opening up and developing topics. We wrote down sample questions as guidelines for our tutorials."
**Peer tutee**
"We had already established our topic, begun reading about it and talking about it in self-help groups with others on the course. We had begun exchanging materials and ideas, and writing timetables for ourselves, about what we planned to do and when."

## What happened during the tutorials?

**Official supervisor**
"I observed four half hour tutorial slots each day for one week. This amounted to twenty tutorials, one each for 20 of the 24 B.Phil. students. I observed what was happening, and noticed the following: the tutees' body language was animated (waving of hands, closing of body space between interlocutors), their speech faster, more fluent, more confident than in official tutorials. I noticed that concepts which had been hazy and undeveloped earlier, became consolidated as they conveyed them to a third party who had been outside the original negotiating process."
**Peer tutor**
"We were able to put into practice the notes we had prepared, and it turned out they were insufficient. Questions came up which we hadn't expected and whilst I expected to focus on academic content, sometimes the main areas we discussed were study skills, tips for note-taking, writing, studying, and more personal matters such as keeping morale high."
**Peer tutee**
"We talked through the outlines and abstracts, and we were surprised how helpful the process was. The peer-tutors had recently experienced the same problems, fears and blocks as we had. They could share with us the strategies that had helped them get through."

## What did we feel after the tutorials, and what were the outcomes?

**Official supervisor**
"After the peer tutoring, I felt the tutees were more confident and asked more specific questions about their work. They were using 'official' tutorial time more effectively as a result."
**Peer tutor**
"All of us thought it had been a positive experience. Not only did we feel we did indeed have something to offer our peers, we felt that talking through their ideas helped us consolidate our own."
**Peer tutee**
"I felt it helped me with my outline, my abstract was written and checked, and my peer tutor listened with real interest and attention. Having a specific project to discuss meant I got to know my colleague in a way I hadn't before, and I feel I could continue that professional partnership now at work."
"I still believe the peer tutors got more out of this experience than we did. Some of the advice I got contradicted the advice from my official tutor, and I was confused. Sometimes I had an idea, just at the early stages, and I wasn't ready to talk about it."

## Did the tutoring in fact make a difference to the actual dissertation?

Clearly this question cannot be answered definitively, since we had no group who were outside the peer tutoring provision and whose performance we can compare. However, we can certainly draw comparisons between those tutees who continued to avail themselves of tutorial support once the official framework was removed, and those who did not.

Seven undergraduates out of ten in one centre continued peer tutoring with their senior colleagues. Amongst these seven, six completed in time and one received a higher grade for this piece of work than for any others in the degree assignment schedule. The seventh member of the group submitted at a later date, and was narrowly saved from giving up altogether by the support and rallying of her peer group. The three who did not avail themselves of the peer tutoring facility, had problems completing their dissertations in time, sharing the books they needed and following the protocol of academic writing (resolved by peer editing).

From the entire cohort of 24, 16 dissertations were completed in time. All those who completed reported the effectiveness and helpfulness of peer tutoring, 'at the right time' when questions about morale were foremost.

There are certainly other factors embedded in these correlations. For some, peer tutoring was a very practical arrangement, taking place with colleagues in their own institutions. For others, such links involved travel and

integrated less naturally into the working timetable.
The differences also reflected differences in personal style and preferences. Some participants had enjoyed the challenges presented by the course, such as group projects, team presentations and micro-training. They saw the collaborative process, and the peer tutoring relationship, as further examples of challenge from which they could learn and develop. Conversely, those who had found these course challenges uncomfortable or threatening, also found the peer tutoring arrangement unhelpful. In other words, there was some element of predictability in students' reactions. The peer tutoring did not change those who already found co-operative development unhelpful. Could it be, then, that our argument is circular?

## Did the peer-tutoring process generate change and development?

It is this question for which we have the clearest answers. The peer-tutoring process did indeed change attitudes dramatically, at least for some. It changed the peer-tutors concept of themselves as potential mentors and trainers: it changed the tutees' approach to their own subject matter, giving them confidence to see their way to completion. Most of all, it changed the partners' attitudes to one another. Both partners recognised what could be learnt from the others. Both felt a sense of achievement at working towards a common goal. Seniors and juniors, who might have been distant or formal at work, worked together, with a sense that both were learning and benefiting from the interaction. It is this which leads us to the key insight gained from this experiment. We believe that no 'simulated' partnership or team activity, no sharing of metaphors, no team-building games are as effective as a 'real' project: a practical, shared goal with an outcome. Examples of shared projects might be a collaborative article (like this one), a jointly devised syllabus or set of teaching materials or a team-taught session. For employer and employee, trainer and trainee, colleague and colleague, planning a project together might be the very best way to build bridges. If there is time to bring the project to completion, the process itself overcomes prejudices, builds self-esteem, provides a context of trust, and leads towards a better and more mutually owned product.


1. Heron John (1989) *Six Category Intervention Analysis* Human Potential Resource Group University of Guildford Surrey
2. 2. Edge Julian (1992) *Co-operative Development* in ELTJ Vol. 46/1 Jan. 1992


**Note**
The official supervisor's voice here is B.Phil. course leader, Jane Spiro, who set up the peer tutoring jointly with M.Ed. course leader Tom Hunter, both colleagues at University College of St. Mark and St. John
The peer tutor's voice here is Kora Basich, representing the voice of her M.Ed. colleagues. Their views were collected through interviews and questionnaires and are reproduced here with their permission.
The peer student's voice is a composite collected from letters written to the course leader before, during and after the tutoring process.

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# Teacher Training: A Web of Trust

**Clyde Fowle, Thailand**

## Introduction

This article is based on reflections on an in-service teacher-training course for non-native speaker teachers in Thailand and readings in the area of trust in learning. Whilst planning, conducting and reflecting on the course the key concept that kept recurring in my mind was the importance of trust, in various forms, and its contribution to the success of the course. The threads of trust that emerged were: trust in myself (the course co-ordinator); trust between the trainers; trust between the trainers and the teachers; trust between the teachers; and the teachers' trust in themselves.

## Context

The course was a two-week intensive programme for secondary school teachers, focussing on communicative methodology. The group included teachers from prestigious private schools as well as government schools. All participants attended the course free. Some were very keen, and some were compelled to attend by their institutions. All participants had a pre-course interview to ensure they were suitable for the course, both in terms of linguistic level and their beliefs about teaching and professional development. In the interview we discussed their teaching and their developmental aims. The group was quite varied in terms of the participants' experience, existing pedagogic knowledge base and level of commitment. Many of the teachers expressed anxieties in the pre-course interview about their own linguistic ability or level of pedagogic knowledge; most saw the course as a potentially face-threatening experience.

The four trainers had all worked together before; two had been involved in language improvement courses for some of the participants; three had been involved in in-service training courses before; and one had little experience of teacher training.

## Creating a trusting training environment

It seemed from the very beginning that it was essential to try to reduce or, if possible, eliminate the face-threatening potential of the course. Many of the teachers on the course were insecure professionally, and some were afraid that their performance on the course might have implications regarding their jobs. Therefore, the teachers needed to feel that the training environment was 'safe', as Loughran states (1997, p. 60) "... trust involves knowing and believing that individuals' ideas, thoughts and views can be offered and explored in challenging ways such that the challenge is professional not personal." They also needed to be supported in overcoming their own insecurities and made to feel more confident in themselves.

## Before the course

The building of a trusting training environment began at the initial pre-course interviews where it was made clear to every teacher that they were viewed as a practising professional with a wealth of knowledge and experience that they would be asked to draw on and share during the course. I feel that recognising and valuing the teachers' existing knowledge on in-service training is a key to building confidence and establishing trust. Thus, from the beginning, a collaborative approach was fostered ... which the trainers and teachers could learn together in a relaxed atmosphere. The trainers attempted to break down their unique 'expert' status and recognise the teachers' knowledge and experience.

## The course content and rationale behind it

The content and organisation of the course was planned in order to facilitate the establishment of a trusting environment from the start. The first sessions of the course aimed to build personal relationships between those involved and draw on the teachers' previous learning and teaching experiences. As the teachers came from varied backgrounds it was important to build relations between them and try to establish common areas of knowledge, experiences and beliefs.

The course started with 'ice-breaking' activities, sessions on 'Shared language learning and teaching experiences' and 'What makes a good language learner?' as well as a 'Foreign language learning experience', which was followed by a discussion of the method used in the session. These 'foundations' served to provide the trainers with in-depth knowledge about the teachers' experience and beliefs, and it established a shared understanding between the teachers and the trainers.

We attempted to create an 'open' training environment. It was hoped that the model we presented would be a good example of 'learner'-'teacher' relations that the teachers could take away with them. The training approach adopted the notion that good training should mirror good teaching. As Wallace states (1991, p.18) "It is taken as a truism that the te ching and learning experience in a College or Depa ..nent of Education ought to reflect, *in an appropriate way*, the teaching and learning experience of the schools that the trainees are going to teach in." We therefore attempted to practise what we preached to the teachers.

The course content and philosophy was also made explicit to the teachers from the beginning, as this can help to build trust between trainers and teachers. Bullough also believes (1997) being open with participants about course content is essential in building trust. From experience of similar training courses and in running shorter workshops for Thai teachers in the past I know problems can arise due to the differing expectations of the trainers and the teachers



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involved. The trainers usually not only want to provide the teachers with techniques and activities for use in the classroom but also aim to increase the teachers' understanding of the principles behind them. However, teachers attending such courses often want a 'quick fix', some activities that they can take away and use immediately.

As trainers we felt that we had to offer teachers more than a 'quick fix'. We also wanted to raise their critical awareness and aid them in the process of self-reflection. The teachers did not all like this initally. Such differing expectations can cause frustration on both sides. I therefore explained clearly from the outset that our aim was not solely to arm the teachers with a set of activities to use in class, but also help them develop the skills to understand evaluate, adapt and create activities. Such an approach also helped to accommodate the diversity within the group in terms of the levels they taught, their teaching context and differences in curriculum they followed. The teachers expressed appreciation of this approach towards the end of the course and in their feedback on the course.

## Trainers' trust in the course and each other

One key area of trust that was important to the success of the course was the trust amongst the trainers. We trusted each other on both personal and professional levels, as we were used to working together. We also shared beliefs about teaching and training that were fundamental to the course and facilitated mutual trust.

In planning the course I had to draw on my own experiences of training, both as a trainer and a trainee and on my beliefs about what good teaching and training consists of. I had to select areas to include in the course that I thought would be most relevant to the needs of the trainees. In short, I had to trust my own professionalism and my instincts about this particular course. I needed sufficient confidence in my vision of the training programme to enable me to gain the support of the other trainers and the involvement of the teachers. I also feel that this display of confidence built a confidence in the team of trainers, which was conveyed to the teachers.

On the course one of the trainers had little experience of training teachers, however, the trust that emerged amongst the trainers gave her the confidence to successfully take part in the team. Involvement in planning the course also helps build trust as Knezevic and Scholl noted in their reflections of team teaching (1996, p. 87) "Perhaps the most important factor in the planning process was the respect and trust that we developed for each other." On this course, liaison between the trainers on the macro-planning of the course was limited, but there was support given in the planning and co-ordination of individual sessions. On future courses I would like to increase the level of participation of all trainers in the planning stages to enhance further the team spirit of the trainers. Perhaps as the trainers on this course were accustomed to working together the trust between us was tacit rather than explicit.

## Trainer-teacher relations and building trust

Probably the most crucial aspect pertaining to trust on such courses is the relationship between the trainers and the trainees. In certain contexts, particularly in school teaching in Asia, the person in the 'knower' position has the power to dictate the form the relationship is to take. The relationship that we strived for was one that was humanistic in nature, characterised by collaboration, mutual respect and openness.

Roberts (1998) discusses the importance of "self-agency" in humanistic learning. This is particularly important in the context in which we were training, as the teachers were largely the products of a conservative education system, which they are often re-creating with their learners. Kasbekar (p.63) in an analysis of the Thai education system states "... the overall quality of teaching in most subjects is deemed to be poor and unimaginative. Teachers are accused of encouraging rote learning...." We aimed to help break this cycle and assist the teachers in becoming more self-directed, empowering them to be more competent and confident professionals. We were, in short, attempting to assume a role as trainers that was "*collaborative and consultative*", Wajnryb (1992, p.11). The essence of a collaborative approach is that responsibility is shared, there is mutual respect and understanding and reflection is encouraged.

We attempted to foster a collaborative relationship with the teachers by introducing voluntary, guided journal keeping, which acted as a channel of communication between trainers and teachers, as well as aiding reflection. The teachers were also given the opportunity to work on guided self-development plans during the course, these consisted of reading and self-study in areas of particular interest to them (Fowle and Anyathana, 1999). They also all took part in a materials development project, with support from the trainers; identifying a need in their teaching context and producing materials to take away and use in their own classrooms. In addition the micro-teaching in the second week served to consolidate this collaborative relationship as the teachers worked closely with the trainers and were given a high degree of support.

Head and Taylor note (p.62) "**Establishing trust** means that you decide to be honest and open with your learners about everything that concerns you and them." We felt that most would be gained by all if we were open with the trainees about what was important to us professionally through discussions. As trust was established in the group it meant that we could talk about things in a frank, but non-threatening manner.

## Overcoming anxieties about micro-teaching

In many respects, the micro-teaching was the biggest test of trust on the course. The teachers were sceptical about it from the beginning. This was verbalised by several of the teachers and also noted in journal entries. It was probably seen as the most face-threatening part of the course. In the build up to the micro-teaching the

continued

TRAINERS' TRUST IN THEMSELVES AND EACH OTHER
TRUST BETWEEN
THE TEACHERS AND THE TRAINERS
TEACHERS' TRUST IN EACH OTHER
TEACHERS' TRUST IN THEMSELVES

**A Web of Trust**

teachers' reluctance strengthened and at one point I considered abandoning it as it seemed to be causing so much tension. However, I trusted my experience and went ahead with it asking the teachers to trust us and to try it for at least one day. Many of the teachers later reflected that it was perhaps the most useful and enjoyable part of the course. It certainly strengthened the teachers' trust in the trainers but perhaps more significantly their trust in themselves and each other. Overcoming the face-threatening nature of the micro-teaching was essential for this. Acknowledging that the teachers were professionals with valuable experience in the local context was crucial, as well as instilling in the group the importance of the concept of learning from one's mistakes. Their support for each other in planning, carrying out and feeding back on the micro-teaching also served to consolidate the dynamics in the group.

## Teacher-teacher trust and sharing

The relationships that the teachers established amongst themselves were very important. As was mentioned above, from the outset the teachers were told that their own ideas would be valued on the courses and they would be expected to share their ideas and experiences. They learnt a lot about how other teachers and schools operate, and it became apparent that the level of resources available in a school does not necessarily reflect the quality of the learning that takes place. It soon became clear that the teacher is a key factor in what happens in the classroom. This was a particularly positive and empowering concept for the teachers from the poorer schools. The course also gave the teachers time and a structure in which to reflect on, and share, their own teaching experiences.

Due to the participants' varied backgrounds they all came to the course with different strengths and by working together they assisted one another. This started from the beginning. When some found the course difficult, their peers supported them. This kind of support is indicative of Thais in any learning context, as culturally they have a strong group identity. It was most apparent during the micro-teaching when the teaching groups worked together and mutually overcame their anxieties about teaching and successfully completed this part of the course.

A final display of the trust that had been established between the teachers was their choice of topic for a free session at the end of the course. They decided that it should be an 'activity swap' session in which each member of the group would explain / demonstrate an activity that they use in their classroom. Even the most reticent teachers participated and were given support from the group. This was proof to me of how far they had come as a group and how they had overcome previous anxieties and gained confidence in themselves and their ideas.

## Conclusion

If any learning situation is to be a success one needs to open up and exposes one's weaknesses and have the confidence to take risks. For this to happen most effectively there needs to be a web of trust between those involved. As teacher educators it is therefore essential that we pay attention to building trust into our programmes. It is only by experiencing such a learning environment that teachers will ensure that a similar degree of trust will find its way into their own classrooms. Such a training experience also empowers teachers to become self-directed and builds their confidence in their own professional worth. Trusting teachers should, in turn, empower their own learners in a similar way. It seems that a humanistic/collaborative approach to training is most suited to building trust between and within those involved. In a short training course as outlined above our primary aim was not to change teachers but to help equip them with the knowledge, skills and confidence to begin to change themselves. Trust was certainly a crucial factor in this process.

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# SESSION REPORT

## Ah, Man...Do We Have To: Workshop Ideas for the Reluctant

**Amy Peyton, Japan**

Conversation schools for adults are an inherent part of the landscape here in Japan. Whether they are neon "NOVA" signs jumping out at you on big city streets or smaller, handmade "Happy Dream English School" posters in small towns, these conversation schools often see their teaching base carry certain characteristics. Most often, college grads from English-speaking countries head over to Japan for a year or two in search of money and cultural adventure. They often have a TESL certificate in hand and once situated at a language school, round out their lives with Japanese lessons, a good mix of Japanese and *gaijin* (foreigner) friends, and generally, a comfortable lifestyle. Some of them stay on in Japan, wanting to delve deeper into Japanese studies, finding themselves with a romantic attachment, or just realizing that their wandering souls aren't ready for a 9-5 job back home. Often, teacher development isn't a big concern: "My classes are good and the students like me...so, thanks, but no thanks" is a familiar remark. Conversely, the managers of these schools have no doubt figured out that good teachers + professional development = better teachers, and better teachers = happy students = a good reputation around town. Enter teacher educators, caught between the proverbial rock and the hard place: professional development for those belonging to the "thanks, but no thanks" club. Quite an interesting predicament, indeed.

In my past position as Academic Head Teacher for two conversation schools in Japan, I and three others were responsible for the teacher development program at the schools. Besides the four day orientation and training session for new teachers, we developed a series of professional development workshops, to be held once a month for 90 minutes each. Realizing who our audience was, we clung onto four principles: awareness, assembly, accessibility, and amusement. What follows is a brief discussion of these four principles and then, a discussion of a workshop suggestion designed to be low-maintenance for the teacher educator and high-interest for the practicing teacher.

Raising **awareness** was the first of our priorities. Due to the fact that the majority of our teachers had prior teaching experience, we didn't want to create a "classroom" environment that would portray us teacher educators in any way other than a colleague. We were looking to be facilitators, nothing more. Furthermore, we had a wealth of culture and experience at our school—all we had to do was provide a forum in which to share it. Fortunately, we also had quite a vocal crowd as well, which did wonders for the "**assembly**" (groupwork) element of the equation. **Accessibility**? Practical, practical, practical. Our teachers didn't want theory—and no touchy-feely psycho-analyses either. "Crystal clear" was the motto here, and anything that could be immediately filed away as "hey, I can use this" would win hands down. Lastly, **amusement**: not a big mystery here. If teachers are giving up ninety minutes of their free time, discussion and laughter would have to be heard resonating in the hallways, or our professional development program would be over before it had begun. Here's what we did with one ninety-minute session.

### Workshop: "Visions from the Other Side of the Desk"

### Planning the Workshop

**Focus:** General awareness-building of teaching styles, beliefs, and methodologies

**Materials needed:** A speaker of a foreign language that the participants are unfamiliar with. Those languages bearing different character systems are especially helpful (i.e. Arabic, Chinese, Russian, etc.), although we used Malay, which has a Roman alphabet.

**Time:** Ninety minutes: forty minute practical session, five minute break, twenty-five minute small group discussion, twenty minute large group discussion.

**Profile:** The purpose of this workshop is to clarify one's beliefs about teaching—to realize why we do the things we do—and most importantly, to identify the reasoning behind these actions. An effective strategy is to revert back to student mode, placing ourselves on the other side of the desk yet again. By putting ourselves in this position, we are reminded of our learning styles: both what works and what doesn't. Furthermore, almost on a spiritual level, by observing the visiting teacher, we may recognize certain factors in our own teaching that are less than productive.

**Preparation:** Obtaining a visiting teacher (not connected with the school you are working for) for about forty minutes will require telephoning around to universities, homestay organizations, and the like at least three weeks in advance. In selecting a visiting teacher, we considered: age (roughly 20-35), experience (0-3 years), and education (undergraduate degree needed) in order to provide a visiting teacher our participants could relate to. To prepare the visiting teacher for the task at hand, you need to provide the following: **1)** a full introduction of yourself, your title, and that you are trying to find a person who could teach a small group (10-20 is best) of teachers a one-point lesson in a foreign language (a one-point lesson could be daily greetings, how to order a drink in a bar, etc.). **2)** time required: the visiting teacher will have forty minutes to teach the lesson (and at the end of that forty minutes, if the lesson isn't yet finished, explain that you will politely interrupt the lesson and thank the teacher for coming. This is to signal the end of the practical session of the workshop) and then his/her work is finished. It is advised that the visiting teacher not be involved in the small-group or large-group discussions—the workshop participants may feel reluctant to express their honest reactions to the lesson if the visiting teacher is present. **3)** expectations: the lesson content and execution is up to the creative vices of the visiting teacher, except reiterate

*continued* →



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that a lesson on only one language point is desired. Most importantly, explain that in order for this workshop to mirror the participants' own teaching situation (everything is taught in the target language), the forty-minute practical session must be taught in the visiting teacher's native language, **4)** directions: a faxed map to the location of the school or even better, a contact point where you can meet the teacher personally and take them to the school, and **5)** a meeting time: approximately thirty minutes before the session is to begin. Anticipate questions about your teaching situation, program participants, photocopies, etc. As to payment, usually a small fee for the visiting teacher is appreciated, although this is up to the school and the teacher educator. A final word of advice: it is important not to dictate how you wish the the visiting teacher's lesson to unfold. These spontaneous moments, along with the belief systems of another teacher, are sacred, and good or bad, will be a valuable learning experience for the participants.

## Executing the Workshop

**Presentation:** Arrange the chairs in a semi-circle if possible, or in clusters of three or fours, making sure that no-one's back is towards the teacher.

**Agenda:** It is extremely valuable to spend a few minutes explaining to the teachers why they are there and what they will see. In our session, we explained:

- The title ("Visions from the Other Side of the Desk") and goals of the session: see the "Profile" section above for a discussion of these items.
- The timing of the session: forty minute practical session, twenty-five minute small group discussion, twenty minute large group discussion.
- The discussion: Tell the teachers what they will be discussing in the post- session small and large groups. A list of possible discussion questions for use in the post-session are found in the following paragraphs. Although these particular questions worked well in our workshop context, feel free to change or rewrite any question to suit your particular needs. Of course, explain to the participants that these questions are merely springboards for discussion and that they are free to extend their discussions beyond the parameters of the questions provided.
- The teacher: Introduce the teacher, where he or she is from, and what the teacher is planning to present in terms of the one-point lesson.

**Lesson:** Now comes the intriguing part! Let the visiting teacher go to it! Sit back and enjoy, observe, and perhaps even formulate some hypotheses about what directions the discussion will take. After forty minutes, if the session has not yet finished, politely interrupt and thank the teacher for coming.

**Post-Session (Small-Group)Discussion:** Small groups of three or four are best when entering this stage of the workshop. The teachers are to spend the next twenty-five minutes discussing what they learned, observed, and felt in the practical session. Posting the following questions will help keep the discussion on topic, but the questions are by no means absolute. Lastly, the following questions were formulated anticipating that the visiting teacher would use a PPU (Presentation, Practice, Use)-style lesson plan which is fairly common in Japan. However, be aware that there is current debate on the validity of PPU-style planning and that this approach may not be practiced or used by some teachers. Whatever teaching approach is used, the questions for discussion should be tailored to fit the goal and needs of your workshop.

**Questions for Reflection**

I. The Content of the Lesson

- What language point did you learn?
- Would this language point be useful in real life?
- Was it too much to learn in forty minutes? Was it enough?
- Did you feel like you **learned** the language point? Could you use it again if you were to travel to that country? If not, what could have been done (by you, your classmates, or the teacher) to have ensured your learning of the material?

II. The Presentation of the Lesson

- How did the teacher introduce the lesson topic to you? Did you find this workable? If not, what would work better for you?
- What kinds of teaching strategies did the teacher use to teach you the language point (writing on the board, pictures, examples, gestures, real-life props)?
- Was this useful? Was this helpful? Was this enough?
- What did you like? What could have helped you more?
- Did you practice/use the lesson point?
  - If so, how? (Drills, role-plays, games, flashcards, etc)
  - Was this useful? Was this helpful? Was this enough?
  - What did you like? What could have helped you more?
- Was there any part of the lesson that you didn't understand?
  - Did you ask for help from the teacher? Why or why not?
  - How did the teacher try to help you understand?
  - Was the second explanation beneficial?
  - What worked for you? What would you have liked to see done?
- Did the lesson keep your interest? Why or why not?

III. The Follow-Up

- Did the teacher determine if you learned the language point? Did the teacher evaluate you?
  - What If yes, how? (oral quiz, written quiz, worksheets, student- produced dialogues or role-plays, etc.)
  - What If no, would you have liked a final "quiz" or activity to test your knowledge of the language point in question? Why or why not? What would you have liked to see?
- Are there any other observations that you would like to share with your group?

**Post-Session (Large Group) Discussion:** These last twenty minutes are rather unstructured. Give all the participants the chance to come together in a large group and ask them if anyone has anything else to say. This is closure time. With a few minutes remaining, it is often useful to pass out a feedback sheet to be collected before the participants leave the workshop.

## Processing the Workshop

**Follow-up:** We found it beneficial to sit down immediately after the workshop finished and have a "jam session" on how the afternoon went. We look over the feedback sheets, recall interesting points or observations made during the course of the workshop, type up a factual report detailing what was covered in the workshop, and lastly, brainstorm a list of "Do's and Dont's" to remind us next time what we should do differently. For example, a few revelations on our list included:

- DO ask the participants to phrase their comments in "I" language during the discussions: "I felt...when...." or "...didn't work for me personally." To keep the discussion fruitful, don't allow them to teacher-bash. It's a values judgment, and therefore, very personal. Keep the language neutral.
- DO insist on the target language being used whenever possible by both the visiting teacher and the workshop participants during the language lesson.
- DO ask them on the feedback worksheet what they will take with them when they leave the workshop. Ask them to articulate what, if anything, they learned about their teaching beliefs or teaching styles.
- DON'T be tempted to join their discussion groups, not even to offer "just one comment." It changes the dynamic of the discussion groups and puts the teacher educator in a surprise "holier-than-thou" position.
- DON'T forget to call the visiting teacher a couple of times before he/she comes to your school. Clarify lesson content, expectations, meeting times/places, and financial compensation.

**Follow-Up II (Straight from the Battlefield):** In our session, the visiting teacher was a delightful woman from Malaysia who was a university student in Fukuoka. Her teaching experience was basically limited to tutoring businesspeople in Malay, yet she felt comfortable participating in our workshop as long as the content of the lesson was limited. She chose to teach greetings and numbers to our teachers, coming prepared with handouts and other visual aids to facilitate learning. In retrospect, we (our visiting teacher and the four teacher educators) agreed that teaching greetings would have been enough, and that by having numbers taught as well as greetings, overloaded the participants with information. During the discussion groups, the comments from the participants centered mainly on the importance of providing numerous yet varied opportunities to practice the language point. One teacher specifically pointed out the need to come prepared with activities that support various learning styles (visual, kinesthetic, auditory, etc.). In general, the workshop was well-received and the participants noted on their feedback sheets that they appreciated the "hands-on" approach of the session, having feared a lecture.

In conclusion, **Workshop Ideas for the Reluctant** might take a little more thinking power, but it definitely gets the creative juices flowing. By providing your teachers with innovative teacher-development sessions, they not only take personal revelations and queries with them when they leave, but a sense of renewed energy as well.

# PROCESS OPTIONS

## Crosswords – in a training session (and in a classroom)

**Kathy Bird, Sultanate of Oman**

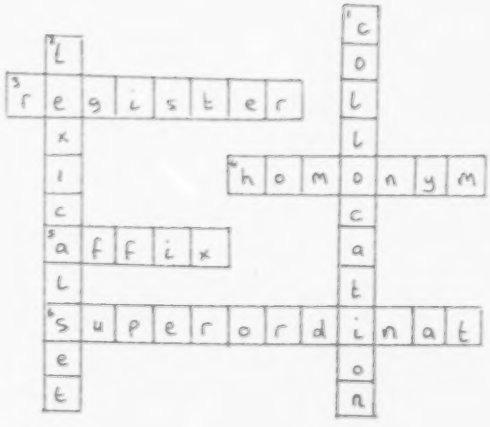
To revise vocabulary ; use 'clueless' crosswords. The idea is, the trainees (students or pupils) write the clues themselves. I have used the technique many times in classrooms and teacher training sessions, because it has proved to be so successful.

### Before Class

First of all, I decide what words I want to revise. I divide these into two groups, then fit the two groups into numbered crossword frames – A and B:

**A**

**B**



continued



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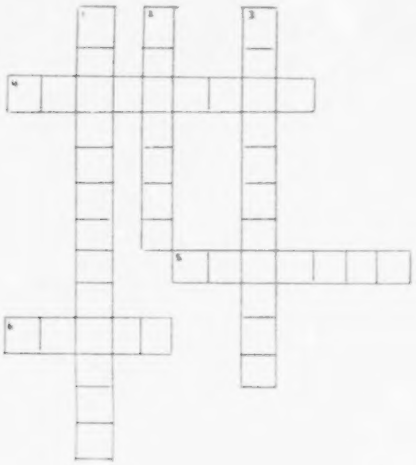
Next, I make blank frames A and B, with corresponding numbers, and numbered lines for the crossword clues to be written on:

**A**



Across

1 _____

2 _____

3 _____

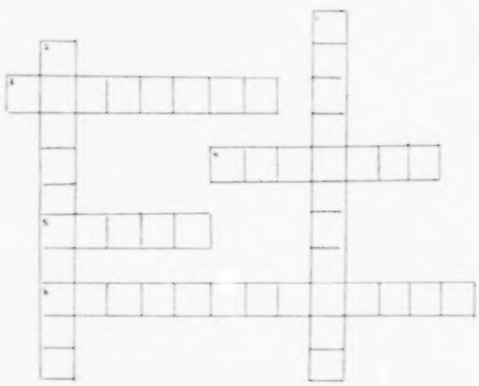
Down

4 _____

5 _____

6 _____

**B**



Across

3 _____

4 _____

5 _____

6 _____

Down

1 _____

2 _____

## In Class

In the class, I divide the trainees into 2 large groups (A and B), and within these groups, I put the trainees into small groups (of no more than three) and give half of the groups crossword A word frame and the blank crossword with numbered lines for the clues, the other half of the groups have B. Each group has access to their books, note books and a dictionary. Their task is to write the clues for the words in their crossword frame on the number lines on the blank crossword sheet. When all groups have finished – Groups A swap their blank crossword with clues to Groups B, and vice versa, but hold on to the word frames. The groups then have to complete the crosswords using the clues written by the other groups of learners.

When they have finished, I usually get them to swap the crosswords back to the originators, so that they can be checked against the word frames.

There are many benefits of using this technique:

a) the session is trainee/learner centred
b) revision is active
c) there is lots of discussion and interaction – particularly when a clue is challenged!
d) much independent use is made of course books and dictionaries (dictionaries of applied linguistics on training courses, learner dictionaries in the classroom)
e) much interest is generated because the clues are created by peers, rather than the trainer/teacher – who is supposed to know (everything?)
f) learner autonomy is fostered – rather than imposed
g) it develops critical thinking skills
h) when this is done on a training session, then it gives the trainees another technique to add to their repertoire.

After I have used the crossword on a training session, using vocabulary important in their training situation, I usually give the trainees a crossword I have prepared – based on the course book they are using with their pupils.

I do find that giving them a prepared activity to try straight away encourages them to prepare similar activities later. It might be a bit more work for me, but it is certainly worth it. I have also found that doing this makes trainees think more carefully about other techniques used on the course – and how they can adapt them to their classroom situation.


## Back Issues

If you'd like to know what articles you've missed in back issues of '*The Teacher Trainer*' send in £8 and a large self-addressed envelope and we will send you an index entitled '*The Story so Far*'.

If you would like a photocopy of any article in a past issue, please send in £10 and a large self-addressed envelope and we will send you a photocopy of the article you want.

# Trainer Training Under Difficult Circumstances

**by Anne Wiseman, Peru**

## Introduction

The British Council in Peru was asked by the Ministry of Education (MoE) to run a 'short ' course for Peruvian ELT teacher trainers, some of whom had little experience of EL teaching or training, and limited English. The course was for a new group of teacher trainers who would be introducing the English component of the new Baccalaureate to teachers in their areas.

We were told that the course should cover the topics of teacher training; phonology; pyscholinguistics; grammar; methodology; testing and evaluation; and using the video in the classroom. The course was to last one week.

## The group

The group were very mixed in terms of teaching/ teacher training experience and levels of English. There were 10 participants, all designated to work in the different regions of Peru which they came from. Two had been on training courses in the UK, others had spent a lot of time working as voluntary teacher trainers, whilst others had been chosen by their institution to come, but had no teacher training experience at all. One was a teacher of Spanish who spoke some English.

## The dilemma

Given this rather daunting prospect we spent a lot of time trying to design a programme which would answer the request from the MoE, and also be effective in such a short space of time, given the mixed experience of the group.
(Answers, please, on a postcard!)

## What we still didn't know...

We did eventually design a programme, and discussed it with representatives from the MoE. During the discussions, however, we discovered that the trainers would also need training or remedial teaching in some aspects of the English language component of the Baccalaureate syllabus.

Back to the drawing board!

### Course Outline

| | Content (i.e. topics- what we will be looking at) | Process (i.e. how we will be doing it) |
|---|---|---|
| **Day 1** | Teacher Training/Teacher Development | Analysing Stages of a Workshop |
| | Grammar: The Present Tense | Tasks in Teacher Training (Analysis) |
| **Day 2** | Phonology for the Bachillerato | Exercise Analysis (both written &spoken) |
| | Pyscholinguistics: a) Motivation b) L1 / L2 Acquisition | How to use a video in training |
| **Day 3** | Pyscholinguistics: c) Learning Styles & Individual Differences d) Dealing with Mixed Ability Classes | Teacher Training Workshop - Analysis |
| | Methodology: A Comparative Review | 'Jigsaw' Work in Teacher Training |
| **Day 4** | Methodology: Developing the Four Skills | Teacher Training Sessions – How to Prepare |
| | Evaluation of Teacher Training Sessions | Ways of Evaluating |
| **Day 5** | Planning your 2 week Teacher Training Course | Team Work in Teacher Training |
| | Course Evaluation | Testing & Evaluation (Reviewing the Process) |

The following explanatory notes were given to the participants.

**Course Content and Methodology**
You will see that the course has been designed so that whilst we are covering a particular topic which you will need to be familiar with for the course you are running in February, (labelled 'Content') at the same time we will be covering areas related to teacher training methodology, (labelled ' Process' )
e.g. We will analyse the Present Tenses, (content) by using a series of tasks (process). These tasks are typical of ones which you might like to use in your own sessions later on. We will then spend time analysing the task types for teacher training, i.e. the process.

**Product**
By the end of the course you should each have(produced by yourself or with other trainers)

* A two week plan for the course you will be running Jan 15th – 26th
* A set of four teacher training sessions on each of the four skills in addition to hand-outs which you may reproduce for your own teacher training sessions in the future.

## The answer!

In some ways our life was made easier now, as we had a different base to start from – the language components of the Baccalaureate itself. Using this as the 'core ' of the week's programme, we then based all trainer training sessions around this.

*continued* →



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As you can see from the course outline above (P13), we divided the programme into 'Content' (aspects of English grammar and teaching methodology), and 'Process' ( ways of getting this information across to teachers in the training courses they would run).

## The Details

In the first term of the Baccalaureate, the main grammar point taught is the Present Simple tense. The trainers we worked with would need to ensure that the teachers in their area were familiar with the aspects of this tense which were required at that level. We needed to ensure that the trainers were themselves familiar with the aspect of the tense as it was to appear in the new text book ( not yet produced), and also were able to produce a training session for this language point.

In our own session on the Present Simple Tense we used teacher training task types e .g. discussion/ matching/ ranking/ analysing/ sequencing, etc. After the first part of the session (which focused on the Present tense itself) , the trainers analysed the types of tasks we had given them.(Or, the process they had gone through whilst looking at the present tense). This analysis then served as a basis for the participants to develop their own teacher training tasks later on. At the same time we ensured that the trainers were now fully conversant with the Present Simple tense themselves.

Similarly we combined a workshop on how to use a video with a session on L1/L2 Acquisition. In this session we showed a video about L1/L2 Acquisition, and during this video the trainers were asked to complete various before viewing/ while viewing/ after viewing activities as well as 'sound only' and 'screen only' activities. This was, of course, followed by a discussion not only of the content of the video, but of the process of how the video was used during that session.
Thus the 'process' part of the session covered 'How to use a Video in Teacher Training' , ( a session the trainers were told by the MoE they must do with their trainees), whilst at the same time the 'content' covered the issues of L1/L2 Acquisition – another topic which the MoE had requested we cover.

## The Feedback

The feedback from the course was extremely positive and requests were made for a second course. Inevitably, once many of these new trainers were introduced to the area of teacher training, they felt a need to learn more and in a saddening ( but inevitable) way, felt a little daunted at the task they now realised they were undertaking.

However, on the positive side, the trainers are now training teachers in their region, and a second meeting for all of us is planned for later this year. This should prove very fruitful as then the trainers can come back with the experience to discuss the various aspects of teacher training to which they have so recently been introduced. This will also be an ideal time, before their next period of teacher training, to discuss problems that have arisen so far -as well as discussing triumphs!

# A TRAINER LIKE ME.....

We used to have a column called "Meet a Colleague" which starred teacher trainers from Greece, USA, The Soviet Union (as was), Hungary and Argentina. To update this column and to get a little deeper into interesting issues, we now have the following questionnaire:

- What's your name?
- How did you become a teacher trainer?
- What's your setting now?
- What do you enjoy about your job?
- What do you need from the groups of teachers you work with?
- Is there any area you feel a bit guilty not knowing more about?
- Are there any other questions you'd like to put to yourself and to other trainers who star in this column?
- Can you provide a photo of yourself?

If you'd like to respond to the challenge of answering the questions above in an interesting way that doesn't run over 800 words, please send in your answers to the Editor!

**Tessa Woodward**
**The Editor**
**The Teacher Trainer**
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# THE STORY OF TRAINERELLA

By Gabriela Grigoroiu
University of Craiova, Romania

Once upon a time there was a beautiful girl called Trainerella. She lived a very quiet life, because her mother had died and she had to take care of her father, Behavioural. She was very inventive: she did the housework in many different ways, because she did not want to get bored. And she had her dreams: about a charming prince who would some day discover her and appreciate her for what she was.

But her quiet life was not meant to last. Her father got married to a woman who had a long strange name, Grammatranslationa, and two daughters, Literatchen and Syntakschen. Her step-mother told her she had to do all the housework according to her rules, always starting with the bedroom. Then she had to go to the kitchen and cook the same dishes every day: she was not allowed to be creative at all.

She was busy all day. Only at night could she read books and write down her ideas for the time when her dreams would come true. And tears ran down her cheeks because she felt so lonely and despised.

One morning, at breakfast, Behavioural broke the news to his wife and daughters: "The Prince is going to sponsor a great Conference to be held at his Palace and we are invited to attend it. There will also be a scholarship and any girl may sit for it. Since the Prince will be on the jury, you'd better do your best to get it."

"Well, my girls are most suited for this," stated Grammatranslationa. "Literatchen and Syntakschen are so good-looking and smart that I am sure they can get that scholarship. We shall prepare well for the big party and you must do your best to make him choose one of you." "Of course, mum," giggled the two girls. "May I go too, Father ?" asked Trainerella. Behavioural opened his mouth to answer, but Grammatranslationa spoke for him: "No, you may not. You have no proper clothes, your manners are not refined enough, and you will be very busy anyway preparing our special gowns."

Trainerella had a very hard time and when the Conference started she had to help everybody get ready for the evening reception. She didn't even have tears to weep. "I have forgotten how to speak, I am shy and poor, and I cannot go to the party. I wish I could go because I know he is the prince of my dreams and can support me. I just know he is the one. Oh I wish upon the star in the corner of my window that I could go to that ball."

Just then the fairy, her godmother, approached her communicatively: "I heard you, my dear, I could hear your desperate call. So here I am, because I care about you and I share your sorrow. And now, we'll try some magic." And her godmother made her the most beautiful dress you have ever seen and two tiny crystal shoes. Out of a broken-down computer and its mouse she made a magnificent Rolls Royce and a skilful driver.

"You are ready to go now, my dear, but remember the spell only lasts till midnight, and you have to leave the party before the clock strikes twelve." "Thank you, godmother. I'll do exactly as you have told me. Bye-bye!" "Bye, my child, and God bless you."

When Trainerella got to the palace, the party had already started. The Prince had interviewed several girls, but he didn't seem to be very pleased. No sooner had Trainerella entered the hall than the Prince noticed her and came across to meet her. Everybody was astonished at his direct method.

There was a total physical response on both sides. They danced and talked and laughed and the whole world seemed to be theirs alone. Grammatranslationa was very angry, because the Prince had not approached her daughters so communicatively. Trainerella had kept her silent way and behaved naturally and structurally. She tried to suggestopaedia a lot of things to the Prince.

The clock started to strike the last seconds before midnight. She excused herself and ran away as quickly as she could. In a few seconds she would again become that poor girl in rags, which might make the Prince change his mind. But in her rush she lost one of her crystal shoes. The Prince found it, made several copies, and sent messengers all over the country to look for the girl whose feet would match that tiny shoe.

They did have a hard time finding her. A lot of girls tried it on, but alas! they had no luck. Finally, when Trainerella was discovered, she was sent to attend an ELT course, and she was no longer despised or kept away from people. She even forgave her step-mother and sisters.

And they lived together in a community language learning environment, and started a joint venture on projects for developing cooperation skills, caring and sharing happily ever after...
OPEN END

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# Q AND A COLUMN

## What is BIELT? The editor asks Andrew Brown the Project Director of BIELT.

TW: What does BIELT stand for both literally and figuratively?

AB: Literally, BIELT stands for British Institute of English Language Teaching. Figuratively, it stands for promoting professionalism in English Language teaching.

TW: We haven't really had a professional body in ELT up to now. I mean the sort of organisation that managers or school teachers have and where you can get answers to questions about pensions, or legal matters or where you can visit a dedicated library or attend seminars and gain credit for your qualifications. How will BIELT go about being the ELT industry's professional body?

AB: To be a member of BIELT, an individual needs to have the right qualifications. At the moment, this means a list of qualifications which have existing currency, but we are preparing a recognition scheme, based on a combination of the existing BATQI accreditation scheme for course providers and the existing BATQI framework of teaching qualifications, which will enable us to provide recognition for any teaching qualification which meets the criteria.

TW: You say you have to have the right qualifications to get into BIELT. What happens if you're a wonderfully skilled teacher but don't happen to have the right qualifications? Isn't it academic snobbery to say you can't get in?

AB: It is the nature of a professional association that there should be standards which assess whether someone is appropriately qualified to call themselves a member of that association. I take your point that there may be an excellent teacher who does not have a particular qualification, a particular piece of paper. There are two points to make here. First, I hope it is not too controversial to suggest that, however good someone is, there is no one who is so good that they have nothing left to learn, there is no one who could not add more strings to their bow, more ideas to deal with different situations, which might provide greater breadth or depth to their existing practice, however good that was. As such, there have to be good reasons why someone has never taken a qualification – and there are some exceptions, which I will come to in a moment. But in general, though a qualification does not guarantee a good teacher, it certainly guarantees someone who has made a professional effort to ensure that they are a better teacher than they might otherwise have been.

TW: I can agree with that certainly.

AB: Second, it might be suggested that BIELT should have other criteria for membership than pieces of paper. If we put to one side all the negative sides of this, like the expense for the individual, and the enormous regulatory structure which it would entail, we might consider, for example a system where BIELT had its own exams for entry, or came to observe each member every couple of years to check that they could still cut the mustard. There are logistical and financial reasons why this might be less than popular, but in principle, there is no reason why this might not, in time, be an alternative way of joining. We are in the process of sorting out the simpler route of evaluating suitability for membership by qualification, and sorting out which qualifications, eventually which qualifications from all over the world, are the right ones, but there is no reason why we might not also consider other routes to membership – as long as they did not devalue membership for others. If any of your readers would like to suggest, or even get involved in developing, a suitable system for evaluating an individual's suitability for membership, I would be happy to hear from them. Never let it be said that I am not prepared to consider a good idea. However, it is not something I can start on my own, and between you and me, I am not sure that it is something which many will want to wrestle with. Rather, I suspect, thinking in this direction may gradually raise the standard of membership over the years. At the moment, for example, you can become a full member with a Diploma, but maybe in 15 years you will need to have a Diploma and also to pass some sort of test in proficient use of electronic media, or a specialist test in distributed learning over the internet, or in special sensitivity in providing one to one tuition for business people, or for refugees, or whoever. I suspect, but this is probably a bit too speculative, that it is more likely that other ways of assessing people would become extras, rather than alternatives.

TW: You mentioned that you thought there might be some exceptions.

AB: There are always exceptions in the situation where a professional association or regulatory body is set up in a profession where practitioners have been working for years. There will be some who don't have the right qualification, for example, because in 1962 they were instrumental in actually setting the qualification up, and were the first teacher trainer of the course. Having been a trainer on the course for 15 years, it has never seemed appropriate that they should actually sit for the exam themselves. We recognise that this will be the case now, and for a couple of years, until BIELT is well enough known, and we have to consider each of these cases in the best way we can. Obviously, there is a logical inconsistency in saying to, say, Brita Haycraft, sorry, Brita, but, you never took the CELTA, we don't want you as a member. Brita Haycraft, or any one of probably a couple of hundred other examples of people, or even more, are exactly the sort of people we want to join BIELT, to establish its credibility. But, though there are exceptions today, we need to be setting out a very clear message that this is what is meant by someone being a member. They will be qualified, and their qualification will be at least of this or that standard (depending on the level at which they join) If BIELT membership is to become an international standard, which we hope it will be, if it can be a passport to employability internationally, which we hope on behalf of teachers everywhere it can be, then the standard needs to be set, and upheld.

TW: Once someone is in, what benefits might they hope to gain?
AB: BIELT undertakes to provide a range of services for members, and provide representation for that membership. In providing services, BIELT membership normally includes IATEFL membership as well, so for specifically BIELT services, we have tried to focus on things which IATEFL doesn't already provide. The magazine which BIELT provides has a different focus, with articles on a range of issues concerned with the life of a practitioner working in ELT. The website has a range of information services, member services (such as reduced price hotel accommodation), and practical services related to ELT, such as a jobs area, an area for freelancers to advertise themselves, a reference tool for ELT materials, and so on. Some of these last bits are still being put into place through finance from a government grant we have just received. The BIELT conference is deliberately different – and complementary – to the IATEFL conference, focussing on coordinated strands, rather than individual sessions, and specifically on career development options. Experts in each field designed strands for the conference, to make it as relevant, and as efficient a use of time as possible: for teacher training, Jenny Pugsley at Trinity did a great job bringing together some wonderful speakers.
TW: What about other areas such as a library, a legal department, a government lobby?
AB: We are fortunate that all the UK publishers in ELT have agreed to donate a copy of every ISBN currently in print now, and which comes into print into the future, to set up the definitive ELT reference library. We expect this library also to attract other existing libraries and collections, and to attract publications from publishers working overseas as well, to establish a truly wonderful resource. Tenders to host this collection were requested from all institutions working in ELT, and we hope to have an answer to where this will be based soon.

There will be a need for BIELT to provide either advice, or at least information on where to get advice. It is still very early days, and we don't claim to have a legal department yet, but if we continue to grow at the current rate, then it shouldn't be too long before we will be in a position to help with legal and professional advice as well.

AB: On the subject of lobbying, the amount of work BIELT can do on behalf of its members really depends on those members getting involved to start with. With a substantial membership all of members who are acknowledged as being appropriately qualified, BIELT can provide a face for ELT which it is sorely in need of, both with regard to the national media and the government. As far as the general population is concerned, ELT is either something you do before you get a proper job, or it involves working with backpacked teenagers blocking the paths in our cities. As far as the government is concerned, ELT is just a form of unrecognised, unregulated tourism, which no government department will take responsibility for – or learn that there is so much credit which could be taken for. We all know how much ELT has to offer beyond that in terms not just of revenue but also international contacts etc, but we need to provide a unified, truly representative voice to be able to articulate that with some force.

Having said that, we have hundreds of members already, and more applications arrive in the post every day. I won't be happy until the membership is measured in thousands, and we can really be working on behalf of our members, but we are certainly on the way there.
TW: What do you see as the main differences between IATEFL, the British Council, ARELS, EQUALS and so on?
AB: I hope that the differences between BIELT and the other acronyms and organisations you quote are implicit in what I have already said, but let me say a few words about those as well. In no way should BIELT be regarded as trying to compete with any of the organisations which already exist. Each of them carries out their aims very well, and BIELT only seeks to work with them, and in a complementary fashion. We are not the government representative, which is what the British Council is. We do not seek to provide the excellent member services, particularly the SIGs and the networking, which IATEFL provides, but rather to ensure that our members also have access to them, by bundling IATEFL membership with BIELT membership. It may be that we are able to do the same with TESOL in due course. ARELS provides representation on behalf of recognised employers. We seek to work with those, and other organisations, to provide recognition on behalf of a much larger constituency – all the practitioners.
TW: What's this talk of "practitioners"? Aren't we teachers or trainers or school owners or DOS's etc?
AB: Practitioners is a term demonstrating that the focus is not just on teachers or trainers, but also on editors, or others working in publishing, on consultants, who may be qualified and working in ELT, but not at the chalk face. Or, in state schools, there may be EMAG Coordinators, not DOS's. (EMAG = Ethnic Minority Achievement Grants, the funding for the language support and teaching for the 8 per cent of the school population in this country for whom English is not their first language) However, it is not a point I would want to lose any friends over, so if you think it is inappropriate, I would be pleased to choose another. Perhaps, though, the fact that you had to list teachers or trainers or school owners or DOS's etc, is a good reason for needing a single term (even if practitioners isn't the right one) to refer to all of those just working in a school.
TW: Yes, I see the problem. Maybe we should run a competition to get a better term! One thing I really want to ask you is how you see BIELT addressing the question of gender balance in ELT. There are many women teachers in ELT. As with so many fields however, as you go up through the ranks of DOS, school owner, professor, reader, plenary speaker and so on, there are fewer and fewer women. IATEL has tried very hard to get even numbers of women as speakers and as committee members. What are BIELT's aims and effort in this regard?
AB: It is absolutely true that there are more women teachers than men at the chalk face (I was recently amazed at the difference highlighted through a research project I was involved with for the DfEE), and although I have no statistical information to back it up, it would be my received impression that the division is the other way when it comes to DOS and so on, as you point out.
BIELT's aim is clear: that the elected representatives should be representative of our membership, and that

continued



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means that we should encourage everyone to come forward equally. In fact, of the 8 interim trustees for BIELT, 5 were female, and only 3 were male, so we started well! It is always a tricky one to start to make declarations about ensuring quotas and so on, and I think it would be inappropriate to start. We neither want people elected to feel as though they are tokens nor that people are excluded if they don't happen to fit the demographic category we are looking for. But if the right people will make themselves available, there are no glass ceilings in BIELT. Quite the contrary.

Perhaps the biggest problem with elected officers, though, is people's reluctance to put themselves forward. We have had a few people propose themselves for our first officers, but not as many as we would have liked. From what I understand, this is a common experience, and many elected officers have not gone out of their way to seek office, but have been amicably pressured into standing. BIELT would like the elected officers to be representative of the membership, but we need the membership, at all levels, whether in senior management or at the chalk face, whether male or female, whether full time or part time, to take up the offer of representing our colleagues.

TW: Thanks for your time Andrew!


## Journal Exchanges

"The Teacher Trainer" has arranged journal exchanges with

IATEFL Newsletter (UK)
English Language Teaching Journal (UK)
Modern English Teacher (UK)
RELC Journal (Singapore)
Teacher Education Quarterly (USA)
Forum (USA)
TESOL Matters (USA)
English Teaching Professional (UK)

and is abstracted by 'Language Teaching', The British Education Index, the ERIC clearing house and Contents Pages in Education.


# TRAINEE VOICES

In this second appearance this issue of this popular column Mario Rinvolucri interviews a teacher in training who has writer's block. The teacher has been given the name of "Lily"". This is not her real name as she wishes to remain anonymous.

## A New Challenge

Mario: The other day you told me that you didn't find it very easy to write, and you said it went back to the time when you were at university and I was quite intrigued. Can you tell us something about that?

Lily: Yeah, basically, I think it's due to the time when I wrote a new kind of essay. I'd never written an essay of that magnitude before.

Mario: How long was the essay supposed to be?

Lily: Well, it was supposed to be at least 25 pages and of course very high stylistically. The time went very quickly. There was never a proper explanation or we were never given an example of what the final result was supposed to be. So you went, " OK I'm going to write this essay."

Mario: This was an essay in the area of literature?

Lily: Yeah, it was English literature. I had the idea all figured out but I wasn't clear about how it was supposed to look and the level of it wasn't clear to me. I had a tutor and we discussed my essay, all the first chapters that I'd written.

Mario: Yeah.

Lily: And then I realized that the assessor expected more. A lot more.

Mario: They? Or he, or she?

Lily: Well, the tutor I had and the one who was going to assess my essay were two different people.

Mario: OK.

Lily: So the tutor was quite happy with my idea and what I was doing but the assessor wasn't. So then when I realized there was a lot more expected of me I got writer's block because I didn't know where to elaborate because I thought that I'd said what I had to say.

Mario: Writer's block is a term I think I understand, but I don't understand it necessarily in your way, so could you explain a little bit what happened to you?

Lily: Well, I didn't know what else to write, I didn't have anything more. I didn't know how to begin facing this problem and it just grew and grew and grew and in the end I just sat there in my apartment staring at the wall just totally blank...

Mario: This was over a period of several days.

Lily: Several months, months we're talking.

Mario: Months? My God!

Lily: So I failed to hand it in on time and since I failed to hand it in on time I didn't have the opportunity of tuition, any more. I didn't have access to a tutor. Since it was late, no tutor. I was on my own and that didn't help of course. Well, I did hand something in during the summer to this person who was going to assess....

Mario: Because the deadline was end of May, end of June?

Lily: Yeah, so that was the deadline, I did hand something in then, I didn't give it to my tutor, I had to give it to the assessor person and when I went back to get my essay and see what she thought about it she only said "You're

wasting my time giving me this." So that didn't boost my confidence really, because I thought, "Well my tutor didn't say it was that bad, OK it's not a finished essay but it wasn't a waste of time.". So this essay just hovered over me like a big black cloud all summer, it just ruined my entire summer. And, er, well I changed it a bit and really had to sit down and get down to it and I managed to change a few things and then I handed it in to her again and when I got it back it was with a big sigh.
Mario: That's the way she received it?
Lily: Yeah, She gave it back with a big sigh and instead of just marking in the text saying "Change this" or maybe "Explain this more", like I would have wanted her to, she had actually overlined things and just written down what I was supposed to write instead.
Mario: She wrote her text on top of yours?
Lily: Yeah, and just said, "Well write this instead, do this instead", and I was so tired of the whole thing, so in the end, well, I did her alterations, handed it in and I passed. But when I got it back it wasn't my essay, I didn't recognise it, so you can see why I'm a bit depressed about writing. Every time I try to write I just don't feel that it's good enough.
Mario: Uhun. Have you tried since?
Lily: Yes, of course I have. Since I was supposed to do my master's essay.

## The block gets worse

Mario: So in other words, this has blocked you about doing the master's dissertation.
Lily: Yes.
Mario: Have you sort of started the master's dissertation?
Lily: Well, I've done the research, I've collected the material, I know what to write about, but I just can't...
Mario: Putting it on the page is a nightmare. Is it for the same people in the department?
Lily: Yes, I will, and also, the master's essay is a lot more demanding since I have to write from the point of view of a literary theory. I have to do that. I know what subject I want to write about and I know which literary theory I should quote but I don't agree with everything that literary theory says and I just feel a great resistance about just adopting something and writing through those eyes without ...
Mario: Putting your own things in...?
Lily: Yes.
Mario: So in a way you're still in the middle of all this?
Lily: Yeah, I am
Mario: So, no wonder you refused to write an article for me!
Lily: And nobody to help me with it.
Mario: Yeah.
Lily: So, at the moment since you see I'm quite upset, I just feel I need the distance. It's still too close in a way.
Mario: This was a year ago?
Lily: I was supposed to have written my master's essay, I was going to write that two or three years ago.
Mario: And you've been held up by these feelings since. Do these people know what they've done?
Lily: No, I don't believe they do.
Mario: Maybe they've done it to other people, as well.
Lily: Probably. The head of the English department is, I don't know what to say, he can be very insensitive. There's stories going around the campus about him, of course, and he's said to his students like well "A hippo could have done this better" and stuff like that.
Mario: I don't believe it, well I do believe it, but it's hard to believe.
Lily: It wasn't him who's supposed to assess my essay, but he's really hung people out to dry. For instance, like you were given, every week you had translation homework and you were given a number of sentences and you were supposed to translate them into English as best as you could. It was almost like when you think of old school images with this very dominant teacher and you almost feel afraid to open your mouth because you know whatever I say he will find something wrong with it.
So, its almost the same when I write whatever I learnt. I don't know if it's got to do with,
that I have so, I always compare myself to the best, and I know that I can never....
Mario: Reach that standard.
Lily: It's just so dumb, it's really dumb, that I still get this upset.
Mario: Aren't you reacting sensitively to a foul situation?
Lily: Yes, probably, but on the other hand it IS a foul situation. The logical thing would be not to take it so hard, to just shrug and move on. And I don't know why I can't. It was also, when I was late with my essay people of course started to ask me, "Why are you late, why haven't you handed it in?" and it's one thing to face your teacher with that, because you expect that, you can handle that, but when your all friends start to ask, when your Mum asks, when your partner's asking and you try to say well I just can't write and the only thing I've ever heard in response is just "Well get down to it", "Just sit down and do it".
Mario: And that doesn't help.
Lily: No, it just builds up the pressure.
Mario: What would it take for you to be able to write?
Lily: Maybe if I could convince myself that it was really worthwhile.
Mario: Has there ever been a time when you've written something that you've really liked.
Lily: Maybe when I was little,
Mario: Uhun.
Lily: I wrote a lot of stories, stuff, but that's just childish.
Mario: Can you remember the feeling of that?
Lily: Yuh.
Mario: How was that feeling?
Lily: When you just wrote and wrote and wrote and it never seemed to end.
Mario: Yeah. Have you written a powerful text here on this recording machine I'm holding?
Lily: Mostly whining, whining, complaining.
Mario: So you mean you don't like this text. The tape can't see your facial expression.
Lily: Maybe it's important, but I don't know if it's important for me or for someone else.
Mario: The text you write you mean. Is there an audience, possibly beyond the teachers who have to assess, beyond the university?
Lily: That's just the thing. I wouldn't think that it was good enough.
Mario: Uhuh. Good enough is a kind of hanging comparative – good enough for?
Lily: I don't know. It's almost like, maybe afraid to be judged. What will people think?
Mario: People in general, or specific people?
Lily: People whom I look up to, people who know more.

continued

Mario: For me this is a very important interview, first personally, but secondly about the university, about the way people get treated sometimes in universities.
Lily: It's a very hard environment in that aspect. You have to be able to pass exams otherwise it's back to MacDonalds, or wherever. It doesn't give you peace.
Mario: It's tough. This is a very unfair question, in a way, if you don't want to answer, don't. Is this a unique story or do you think that there are quite a number of sensitive people who are mistreated by the system?
Lily: I think that most people are. I've never heard of anyone who just didn't manage at all, like me. But of course there were a lot of people who didn't hand in on time, and didn't get it done in the right way. I know plenty of people who've been wrongly treated.
Mario: Well, what you said about this particular head of department is quite scary. Thank you very much for the interview.

# CONFERENCE REPORT

## The Second British Council Regional Mentor Conference

**13-16 April 2000, Romania "Mentoring In The New Millennium"**

Hosted by Romania and sponsored by the British Council Romania, ELTeCS and Macmillan Heinemann ELT, The Second British Council Regional Mentor Conference brought to Cluj-Napoca 220 participants. 40 of the participants were non-ELT mentors and methodologists. The countries represented were: Bulgaria, Croatia, The Czech Republic, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malaysia, Poland, Russia, South Africa, UK, USA, Yugoslavia and Romania.

Being the second in what we hope to become a regular mentoring event, (the first one with international participation was held in Budapest in 1998), this conference was a "working forum" for all the key partners in the mentoring activity, i.e. mentors, mentees, methodologists, inspectors, school directors, mentor trainers and decision makers in the Ministry of Education. It was an excellent opportunity to exchange ideas, share experiences, and debate mentoring issues with the declared purpose of working on the practical side of the issues discussed, to find solutions and better ways forward.

As new projects in Romania and in the region have started to extend the ELT mentoring experience to other subject mentors, this conference invited non-ELT mentors and methodologists to take part in the proceedings along with ELT participants. Facilities for simultaneous translation were available all the time.

The conference sessions were prefaced by six keynote speakers who brought the depth of their insight into the field and offered an inspiring starting point for the proceedings. DELLA FISH referred to the complexity of professional knowledge in her opening speech, "Mentoring and the Artistry of Professional Practice" and highlighted the importance of reflective practice as a legitimate form of research. In her closing presentation, entitled "Seeing Reflective Practice Anew: Mentoring and Practitioner Research", ANGI MALDEREZ and CAROLINE BODOCKY's presentation, "The Emergence of Mentoring as a Profession", placed the mentor at the centre of teacher education. In "An Integrated Approach Across Subjects to the Training of Pre-service Teacher Educators and Co-ordinating School Experience", ZOLTAN POOR gave the audience an overview of the content and methodology of mentor and co-ordinator training courses in Hungary . The results of an impact study of mentoring projects carried out in Hungary in the last decade were shared with us by CAROLINE BODOCZKY and KATALIN BALASSA in the presentation "Looking Back to Look Forward", while a more general perspective was given by BRIAN GAY's "Contemporary Issues in Mentoring" in which he explored the nature of the mentor's activity and the way it nurtures change in both the mentor and the mentee.

The 41 ELT and 12 non-ELT workshops, were grouped around three main themes – Preparation, Implementation and Evaluation. We did have a taste of a real pie which we had made for the conference, making sure it had the three layers! It tasted delicious. Many of the workshops were the result of personal experience and research and were planned as valuable input for 10 ELT and 2 non-ELT discussion groups tackling the following topics: Pre-service course design; Teaching Practice Design; Mentee Evaluation; ELT Mentor Course Design; Non-ELT Course Design; Developing Exploratory Teachers; Evaluating Mentors; Management; Networking; Status and Recognition of Mentors/ Mentor Trainers ( in the ELT section); The Psycho-Pedagogical and Applicative Training in the University; The Status of the Didactician as Mentor Trainer in the Romanian Education System ( in the non-ELT section).

Plenary feed-back showed that participants found these discussions very useful. The summaries of the discussions as well as some concrete outcomes, where possible, will be published in the conference proceedings. One such 'product' – the networking list of all the participants to the conference- has already been sent out. Other action plans and their outcomes, requiring more time to take shape, will be published in future issues of "School Experience", a trans-regional mentoring journal.

Hailed as a major achievement, the setting up of the National Association of Romanian Mentors was celebrated at the conference. Last but not least, mention must be made of the friendly, warm and 'busy' atmosphere that made the conference such a memorable event.

Thanks to members of the organising committee:
Sue Mace - British Council ELT Regional Adviser (Northern Romania)
Monica Marasescu - British Council Centre Manager (Northern Romania)
Adriana Vuscan - President of AsMeRo (The Romanian Mentors' Association)

## Brain-clever word choice or the opposite of mistakes

**by Tessa Woodward**

We know that slips of the tongue....times when you mean to say one thing but something else falls out of your mouth....are not random but occur within certain constraints. (See Crystal 1987) For example consonants may get reversed as in, "It was really well-wade " (for well-made). Syllable number and some letters can be the same in the slip as in the intended word as in "I love those sebacious plants!" (for scabious plants). Keep a diary of you and your friends' verbal mix-ups and you'll find this to be true.

For a winter or two I've been keeping a very different kind of diary. It has to do with, what I call, "brain-clever word choice". Here's an example from an article in a science journal.

- After suffering strokes, two patients began to have language problems. One patient made speech errors with vowels. The other with consonants. "The pattern is striking.", says the researcher. The researcher could have said that the pattern was marked or that the difference was clear, noticeable or definite, or great. But he chose, unconsciously, the word "striking" which is virtually a pun given the root cause for the patients' problems i.e. their "strokes".

Brain-clever word choice, in my view, is not the same as deliberate word play or punning. The speaker seems to have no consciousness of having said anything amusing or of having made any uncannily appropriate word choices. Even when it's pointed out to them they may look blank for a while not seeing a connection.

Let me give you some more examples. I've underlined the brain-clever word choice in each case.

- Talking about whether sportswomen are feminine or not, a US basketball player said.
  "Outside the court you can get your hair done, be feminine but when I step on the court, it's a different ball game."
- In a programme on interior design (BBC 2)
  "We were shattered when we walked into a building and found that all the walls were made of glass."
- An American resident in Britain spotting his wife's really red tongue (gained from stealing strawberries) said,
  "I'll bet George Washington accused his son of eating strawberries (rather than of cutting down a tree) and he had to stick his tongue out and say, 'I cannot tell a lie'. Yeah, his Dad probably gave him a licking for eating the strawberries!"
- A singing teacher I once had said.
  "The piano is not really my forte."
- A tutor re-arranging a class schedule on the Monday morning after Princess Diana's death said.
  "I don't think we should do that group mourning activity now. After the weekend , it'd be a bit close to the bone."
- A spectator of one of Damien Hurst's tank exhibits said.
  "He's a strange fish."
- Two friends discussing an 18 year old's prospects of romance.
  "I think it's inconceivable that she won't have a boyfriend some time soon."
- On a gardening programme on TV based in the US desert and while looking at cactuses.
  A."I think if I was gardening around here I'd get hooked on these kinds of plants B."Yeah, they're great, aren't they ? And this was grown from scratch."
- Overheard on a plane.
  Wife, "Don't fall asleep!"
  Husband, "I wouldn't dream of it!"
- Ice skating show commentator,
  "He's got 5.7 Oh Yes! ....Markedly better.
- Two participants on a horse training course,
  A, "So....have you whispered to many horses today?"
  B, " Well...in a manner of speaking."

Once you tune into brain-clever word choice, you'll hear it all around you in conversation, On TV, on the radio. You can get quicker and quicker at spotting it.

What interests me about it, apart from the simple fun of matching word choices to the speaker's topic, is the fact that the decision making is happening at a level that bypasses the speaker's consciousness. Time and time again I've smiled at a word choice, gently repeated it for the speaker, only to hear them say, "I'm sorry, I don't get it!".

Now, many people will happily take the credit for witty word play. "Ouch! Sorry!", they'll say if they have planned a pun or even when they've just noticed an unplanned one the moment it falls from their lips. Brain –clever word choice, on the other hand, seems to be happening at some level that allows its results to sneak out unnoticed, unrecognised, even when they're held up by the scruff of the neck and presented to the parent!

So, if you see me smiling at you when you're talking, it's probably because your brain has just been really clever!

### Reference

Crystal, D. (1987) The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Language (CUP).

# Collaboration between native-speaking and non-native speaking teachers in Slovenia

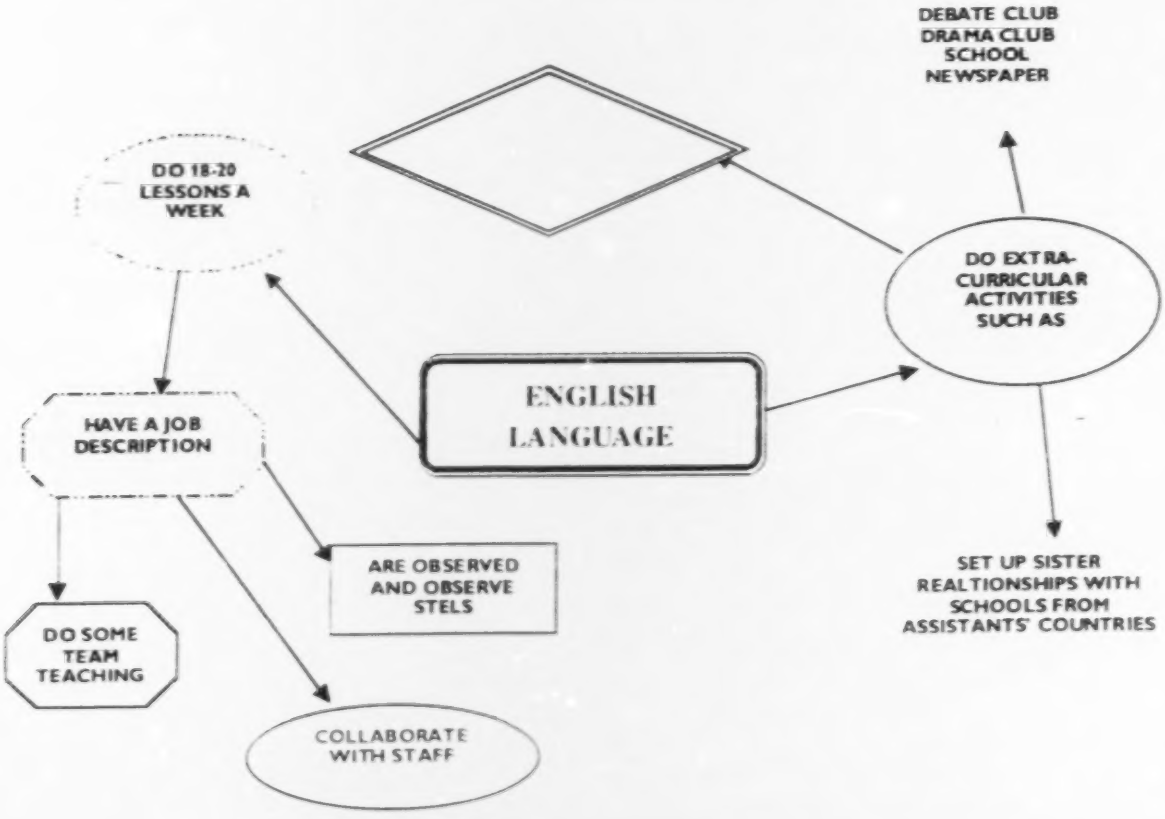
**By Karmen Pizorn and Christopher Bedea, Slovenia.**

## Background

In the mid 1990's the Minister of Education of Slovenia, Slavko Gaber, visited Great Britain and was so impressed by the way that foreign languages were being taught by native speakers (eg. French being taught by French nationals), that he decided to create a programme that would allow British citizens to introduce their culture to this part of the world through an innovative co-teaching scheme. The English Language Assistants Programme has been running in Slovenia for five years now. It was started to improve primary and secondary school students' English language abilities and to provide a resource for Slovene Teachers of the English Language (STELs), such as the exchange of methodologies and teaching strategies with native-speaking Language Assistants (ELAs), and a raising of cultural awareness. There is also an emphasis on team teaching. The Ministry agreed to sponsor the assistants coming to Slovenia by providing a salary comparable to that of a Slovene teacher (equivalent to £423 per month) and free accommodation (the school provides a furnished flat nearby). The ministry has determined that it is far more cost-effective to bring a native speaker here, than to send the entire staff of English teachers to an English speaking country.

*The mind-map below gives a brief overview of the ELA programme:*

The ELA programme has produced both positive and negative results. Some people have suggested that Slovenia does not need native speakers of English in their schools. We would like to share some experiences that demonstrate not only that Slovenia does need native speakers, but that they are essential to EFL in Slovenia. At the same time we acknowledge that a native speaking teacher is better off working in close collaboration with a Slovene teacher than doing things alone. Based on our experiences, we feel that the most effective teaching occurs when a native speaking teacher and a non-native team up.



## The Interview

The following interview illustrates our experiences with team teaching. Karmen Pizorn, (Slovene teacher, mentor and coordinator of the ELA programme) interviews Chris Bedea, (native-speaking participant in the ELA programme) on the value of collaborative teaching in Central Europe.

K: How exactly do you and the Slovene teacher work together?

C: In nearly all of my co-teaching relationships I meet with the Slovene teacher before and after the lesson and we discuss my or our objectives. Many times the Slovene teacher is with me in the classroom, though usually she does not interact in the lesson. With one of my colleagues I am experimenting with a method that involves both of us being in the classroom at the same time and actually sharing the tasks. Sometimes only one of us leads an activity or tells an anecdote, while at other times we both teach at the same time. In all my teaching I either design a lesson plan based on what I would like to teach or I ask the Slovene teacher to give me materials that might focus on a problem area that our students need additional help with. The teachers that I work with are flexible concerning what and how I teach and I am generally given complete freedom to do what I want with our shared classes. In most cases I have only one meeting per week with any given group. The groups have several other hours per week with the Slovene teacher.

K : What ways of team teaching do you prefer?

C: I like it most when both of us (the Slovene teacher and I) are in the classroom at the same time, even alternating the teaching. I think this kind of teaching creates a warm atmosphere. I would even go as far to say that it makes the students feel special, as two people are devoting their time to them. This sort of friendliness is really conducive to the learning process. I also find collaborative teaching to be the least stressful of any kind that I have tried.

K:How do you feel when the Slovene teacher is sitting in the back, writing notes and not being involved at all in the lesson?

C : I think there are many benefits to be reaped from the Slovene teacher being in the classroom, regardless of what she is doing. As long as she is there, the students will take me more seriously and treat my lesson as a full-fledged English lesson, rather than some kind of club or extra-curricular activity where normal school rules can be relaxed or ignored.

K : How do you react when students start using their own language during the lesson?

C: This doesn't really bother me as I realise that an integral part of 'processing' new input is using the mother tongue. Nevertheless, in situations where there is no reason for them to be speaking Slovene, I let them know that I want them speaking English.

K :It is believed that having a native speaker in the classroom presents a real situation for the students. How far do you agree with the statement?

C : I agree with this wholeheartedly. Communicating with a native speaker could be the ultimate 'test' for students. The native- speaking teacher is probably the closest link the students have to the language they are trying to learn.

**K :I know that you usually don't use a cassette recorder. Is listening to a native speaker already a listening comprehension exercise?**

C : The students get a tremendous amount of oral input from the native speaker. This is NOT, however, a substitute for listening comprehension drills. Even though I am a native speaker, I do actually use a cassette recorder (in conjunction with a listening comprehension task, from Headway, Cambridge or authentic texts) quite often.

K : Do you think that you are a good source of information on language and American culture, as well as of realia?

C : Yes, having majored in History and English Literature at college, I am both informed and passionate about American and British culture. I have also had many similar experiences to the characters in one of the novels that Slovene students are required to read (The Catcher in the Rye).

K : The assistant in our system does all kinds of extra-curricular activities. What dimensions can they offer that a Slovene teacher cannot?

C : Perhaps the feeling of authenticity. I have heard students say that they would rather hear a Beatles song performed by a native speaker (though their Slovene teacher may be just as talented a musician).A description of the Scottish Highlands is perhaps enhanced by being delivered by a Scot. Some extra-curricular activities have a longer tradition in the native speaker's country, e.g. Cricket, debate, or square dancing, and therefore, the native speaker might be better able to handle these than the non-native teacher.

K : How much do the differences in the US and Slovenian school systems cause you inconveniences?

C : Not very much. The Slovene mentor is able to help me to overcome any problems I might have with adjusting to a new school system.

K : Are all regular teachers equally enthusiastic about having or sharing a native speaker in the classroom?

C : No. Some are bubbling over with enthusiasm, most are at least moderately interested and a few are not particularly interested. I think the teachers who are most supportive of the collaboration are either deeply interested in the language itself or the culture or perhaps the welfare of their students. I believe that those teachers who show only limited enthusiasm for team teaching, do so because of the time constraints (either actual or supposed), or perhaps because they feel vulnerable and do not wish to expose their weaknesses to the native speaker.

K : Each assistant has a mentor, a Slovene teacher of English, whose role is to help and provide the assistant with essential information. Is this relationship of great significance to you?

C : Yes. Hardly a day goes by when I don't ask my mentor for some kind of assistance. She has helped me to cope with the Slovene language, pursue my hobbies here in Slovenia and in facilitating my integration into the local community.

K : You have been teaching Roald Dahl's short stories with a Slovene teacher to 16- year -old students. How is such a lesson actually executed?

C : Through collaborative teaching where I or the STEL introduces the topic and then we alternate teaching. We are careful to avoid linguistic imperialism, meaning we



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deliberately chose a British work of literature for our course, after having originally considered an American textbook, but then abandoning the idea for the sake of a culturally balanced class. That is, we have a Slovene and an American teaching British literature, thus eliminating possible biases or cultural advantages.

K : Do you think that native and non-native speakers really read differently and does that cause misunderstandings in comprehending literary texts?

C : Yes, in the case of The Catcher in the Rye. Slovene students do not often empathise with the protagonist in the story, whereas native-speaking readers often do. We think this is due to Slovenia having a different value system. It is possible that Slovenes tend not to idealise rebels, non-conformists or those that don't apply themselves.

K : Slovene teachers of English are experts on the local culture and can better understand expected behaviour. Does this make them more effective in the classroom?

C : Definitely from the standpoint of disciplining the students. Other than discipline, I think the students respond better to a native-speaking teacher since he or she is perceived as being an authentic source of language. I've noticed that Slovene teachers are more effective at carrying out administrative tasks in the classroom as they are almost always better informed about school matters than the native-speaking teachers.

K : Some scholars think that only a non-native speaking teacher can treat all varieties of English equally. Do you agree with this statement?

C : My experience has been that neither native- speaking or non-native- speaking teachers treat all varieties of English equally. Native speakers, especially inexperienced ones, are unfamiliar with many of the dialects that exist in English speaking countries other than their own. Many non-native teachers that I know, simply haven't got the time, money or desire to get to know the whole English speaking world. Some teachers that I have known, focus on Britain and seem to ignore the fact, that Ireland, Jamaica, Australia or North America exist. They justify themselves by saying that British English is the 'real' English.

K : This is your third year working as a language assistant in Slovenia? Does that mean that you are satisfied with the ELA program here?

C : Yes, I think that through close collaboration, Slovene and native-speaking teachers can continue to have the positive impact on Slovene schools that they have had during the time that I have been here.

## References:


Dahl, R. Ten Short Stories Educational Edition, Penguin Books (1996)

Salinger, J.D. The Catcher in the Rye, Penguin Books (1994)


# TRAINER BACKGROUND

## Teaching English ThroughPaintings

## A Content-Based Approach To Learning English

**by Bonnie Tsai**

"In the pattern of the arts is the key to all knowledge."

Plato

My experience with content-based learning has convinced me that the combination of language and content can make EFL programs challenging and profitable for both learners and teachers. Teaching through arts-based content motivates students and stimulates them to want to produce language. Why? Because art is engaging, it connects with the visual, it is peripheral, it deals with feelings, it taps the potential to learn, it is provocative because it deals with real problems, and finally it invites reflection on thinking and learning. It can also be a gateway to teaching any subject, any other content.

There are three ideas for teaching through art that I find particularly useful:

I will give examples of these three ways of using art to teach English. They are based on my own experience.

### Someone else's shoes

Let's take a painting like, "My Village" by Marc Chagall or "Starry, Starry Night" by Vincent Van Gogh. These pictures are easily obtainable in poster or post card form and can then be transformed into an overhead projector transparency if you prefer these to posters for use in class.

Give students time to look at the picture and then ask them to brainstorm questions using: What if ... ?, How ... ? Why... ??
Thus the group explores the painting through questions which encourage them to think about the picture as opposed to merely describing it.
This is like trying on some of Chagall's or Van Gogh's ideas.
Here are a few examples of the kinds of questions students come up with when they have a look at "My Village".

What would it be like if the background was less busy?
Why did he want to use natural creatures?
Why did he divide the painting up into sections?
Why did the painter use so many circles and triangles?

Why are some of the people upside down?
How are the man and the cow communicating ?
Was the artist thinking about his own village?

The questions can be written up on a board or flip chart. Next, students can work with a partner to answer one or more of these questions. What works equally well is to ask everyone to choose one question and to draw the answer to it.

Thus a drawn answer to the first question above, " What would it be like if the background was less busy? " might be a picture of the man and the cow without any of the background.

We immediately see that this absence of background moves the man and the cow further apart somehow, making any conversation between them difficult. It certainly takes away the feeling of complicity which seems to exist between the man and the cow in the original picture. Thus we come to understand more about this picture.

There are two important points to keep in mind when working with a painting with these questions:

1. Stay anchored on what's actually in the picture. Don't try and invent a story or begin a lecture about the life of the painter.

2. Work on the intent of the artist. What did he or she really (want to) express?

## Anthropomorphising

Let's take any one of Turner's many paintings which show conflict in nature. I use one that shows the sun rising through fog. If you happen to be in London, go and see the Turners at the Tate Gallery. There you'll find wonderful examples of the type of paintings I recommend for this activity. Ask the class to create a dialogue, in this case, between the fog and the sun. Thus students are using creative anthropomorphising to explore the idea of conflict.

Another good painting for creative anthropomorphising is Van Gogh's painting of his old shoes. Students brainstorm everything they can think of about the person the shoes belong to. Then one person agrees to " become the pair of shoes " and the class interviews the " old shoes ". This is a wonderfully liberating experience for students because, after all, there are no limits to what you can ask an old pair of shoes and no limits to the replies the shoes can give!

## Clues to perspective

The idea here is to take a painting that is puzzling, or open to interpretation, in some way, and to explore the puzzle in class discussion. For this idea to work successfully, you need to use a painting with several people, animals, and objects in it. A painting which works well because of its provocative nature is "Nanny in Rose" by Scott Prior. It shows a girl sitting on a chair on the front porch of a house. She has a dog at her feet. The painting hangs in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts.

With the particular picture you have chosen, first ask the students to consider the people, animals and objects in the picture. So, here, students might wonder, what the girl's internal thoughts are, and what about the dog sitting at her feet? And why is the chair she's sitting on so different from her next door neighbor's chair? Next, ask students to think about the words or phrases that the characters or objects might use. These can be brought together into a dialogue.

Another example of a painting open to interpretation is "The Letter" by Monica Stewart. It shows a woman deep in thought holding a letter in her hand. Students can be asked who the letter might be from, what might be in it and how the woman feels about the contents of the letter. Students can eventually be asked to write their own versions of the letter.

## Conclusion

I have mentioned three ways of working with reproductions of paintings that you can buy inexpensively in any art gallery. By using exploratory questions, creating imaginary dialogues between people, objects and people and by looking for puzzles in the paintings, students can have very interesting discussions in class and can try on other people's viewpoints and experiences.

My own experience has been that using art to teach English has opened up doors for me. I'm amazed at how much better I know my students. I have also found that art stimulates them to produce large amounts of language, more than I believed them capable of. Then of course there is the human, breath-taking side when a very quiet and shy man from China suddenly discovers his own village in Starry, Starry Night.

Using art is a chance, don't let it pass by.


## !NEWS!

Pitman Qualifications and the Centre for English in Education (CELSE), Manchester University, UK are now providing an Access Certificate in English Language Teaching (ACE). The award enables candidates to gain an initial language teaching qualification in communicative language methods.

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# PUBLICATIONS RECEIVED

This column picks out publications of relevance to modern language teacher trainers and swiftly describes them so you can check if they are interesting enough to read or buy.

**How to teach English** by Jeremy Harmer (1998) ISBN 0582-29796-6. Longman. For pre-service, inexperienced EFL teachers. Discussion of how to: be a good teacher and a good learner, manage and describe teaching, learning and language, teach the four skills, use textbooks, plan lessons and solve classroom problems. Mainstream, adult, UK, EFL. Includes a Task File of photocopiable training tasks.

**The book of days** by Adrian Wallwork (1999) ISBN 0-521-62612-9. CUP.A resource book plus cassette of skills materials based around particular special days of the year (e.g Carnival, Christmas, Fasting, Mother's day, Diwali, Summer Solstice) and designed to inform and entertain teenagers and young adults via discussion. Black and white and slightly dated visually.

**Teaching very young children** by Genevieve Roth (1998) ISBN 84-294-5446-2. Richmond pubs. Looks at the development of children between 3-8, implications for the teacher and then explains how to set up a wide variety of simple activities in class using minimal resources. Well laid- out with questions in the margin. Jargon-free. Includes photocopiable templates An excellent book for starter teachers or teachers new to the age level.

**Computer literacies** by Chris Corbel (1997) ISBN 1-86408-330-1. NCELTR. An activity-based course helping you to work, step by step with diskette of sample files, through text types such as word -processed documents, spreadsheets, email, presentations, Encarta and the world wide web. Aims to get you more confident at working professionally on-line. Not for zero beginners. Based on Word 6.0 or 7.0, you need Windows 3.1 or '95 on your PC.

**A teachers' grammar** by R.A. Close (1992) ISBN 0-906717-48-5. LTP. A revised edition of Close's "English as a foreign language" which argues that the grammar of English is a matter of relatively few but quite powerful distinctions including that between objective grammar as Fact ("children" not " childs") and subjective grammar as Choice ("I live/am living in Kent" are both possible).

**The guide to languages and careers** by A.King & G.Thomas (1997) ISBN 1-87401686-1. Designed for modern languages students, parents, teachers and career advisors in the UK, this independent guide from CILT provides course and careers info for post- 16 and post- 18 year olds. Includes advice on study and work abroad and a useful book list.

**The effective use of role play** by Morry van Ments (1999) ISBN 07494-2799-X. Kogan Page. Role play is used as an experiential method to help students to understand real life problems and human behaviour. This book discusses the place of role play, different types and their strengths and weaknesses, allocation of roles, briefing, running role play sessions and the all-important de-briefing stage. A flat, straight forward style but thorough with useful practical tips.

**Reinventing ourselves as teachers** by C. Mitchell & S.Weber (1999) ISBN 0-7507-0626-0. Falmer Press. This book by Canadian authors explores the use of photography, written memoirs, movies and video and invites pre- and in-service teachers to explore their professional identity. Using practical examples from workshops and daily life, chapters deal with memories of our own school days, school photos, teachers' bodies and images of teachers in popular culture.

**Target language, collaborative learning and autonomy** by Ernesto Macaro (1997) ISBN 1-85359-368-0. Multilingual Matters. The concept of teaching exclusively through the target language is explored and related to two current pedagogical issues: peer collaboration and learner autonomy. Critical discussion is supported by analysis of empirical research (The Tarclindy Project).Views and experiences of teachers and pupils are woven into the commentary along with short lists of practical ideas to try out.

**A guide to learning independently** by L. Marshall & F. Rowland (1998) ISBN 0-335-20366-3. Open University Press. Pocket-sized. Small type. Helps you to: understand how you learn and study, plan your study, adapt to independent study within a formal institution such as a university, formulate memory strategies, use and evaluate research material, use libraries and lectures well, participate in discussion groups, improve your writing. Very sensible, workable ideas throughout.

**Languages and work** by Tony Giovanazzi (1997) ISBN 1-874016-85-2. An occasional paper of some 45 pages produced by CILT. Considers foreign language learning policies in the UK, USA and Australia since neither school leavers nor employers have confidence in young people's communicative competence in foreign languages despite modern methods.

**Thinking through the curriculum** Eds. R.Burden & M.Williams (1998) ISBN 0-415-17202-0. Eleven contributions on approaches to developing cognitive skills specific to different subjects taught at schools. Includes one on teaching thinking through a foreign language which refers to Feuerstein's Instrumental Enrichment Program.

**Spoken language and applied linguistics** by M.McCarthy (1998) ISBN 0-521-59769. CUP. Brings together a number of studies by the author, all based on the Cambridge Nottingham Corpus of Discourse in English (CANCODE) spoken corpus. The book is about using everyday spoken language as a model for language teaching, classifying different types of spoken language and the status of spoken language as an object for study within applied linguistics. Corpus examples throughout.

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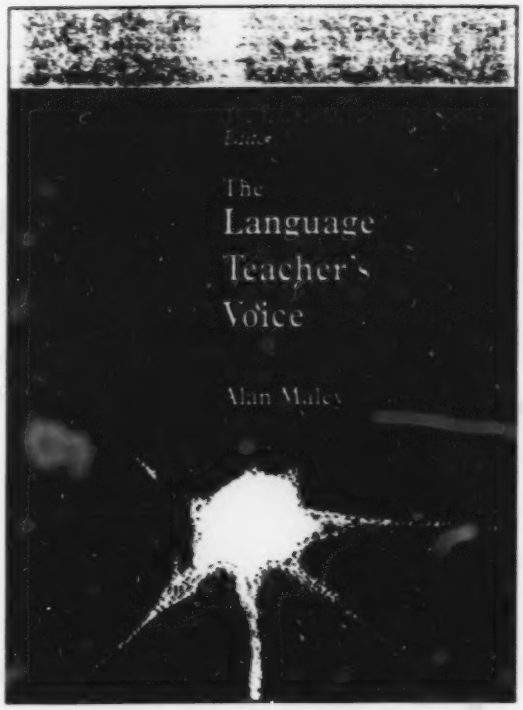


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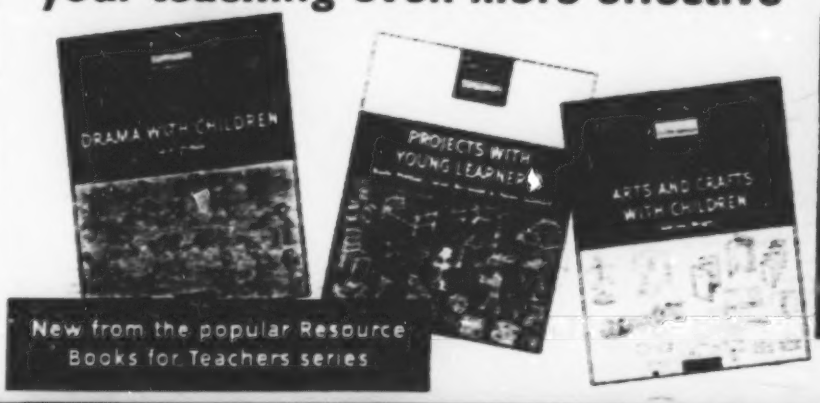


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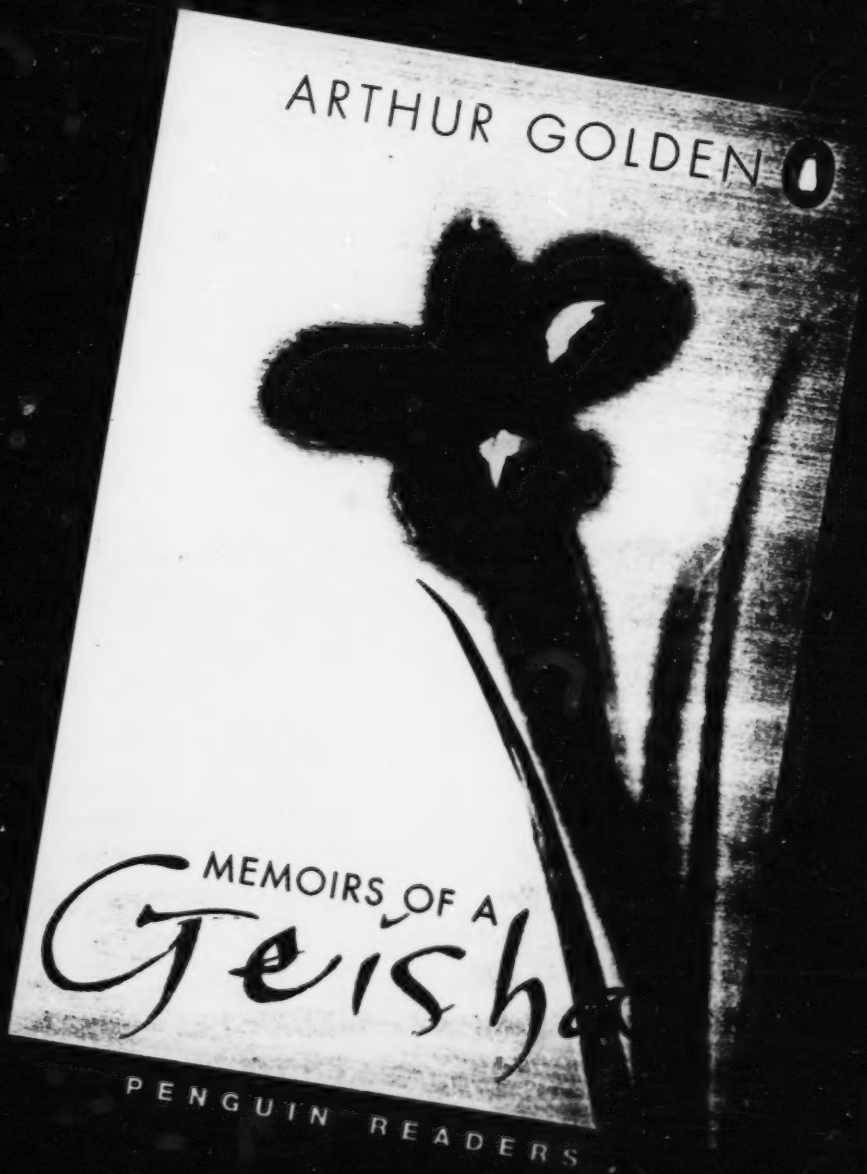


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